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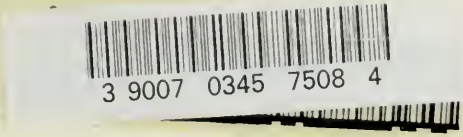
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A NEW VEIN IN LITERATURE.

MRS. E. BURKE COLLINS,

the popular novelist, has struck TWELVE in her latest novel,

"A MODERN HEATHEN."

"What Geo. W. Cable's writings are to the Creoles of New Orleans, Miss Murfree to the rough strata of humanity among the Tennessee mountains, and Gertrude Atherton to California, Mrs. E. Burke Collins' are to the Arcadians of the Louisiana Pine Lands."—*The London Graphic.*

"A new novel, the work of a master mind, which will be read and recognized as one of the *foremost* and *original* books of the year. Charmingly written and filled with pathos, sentiment, mystery and deftly drawn character sketches."—*New York Herald.*

"'A MODERN HEATHEN' will be a welcome novelty and pleasure to the novel-reading world."—*Philadelphia Times.*

"Mrs. E. Burke Collins, in her new novel, 'A MODERN HEATHEN,' has struck a new vein

in literature, opening a vision of the real life of the Arcadians of the backwoods of Louisiana.

Into the very heart of the bayous and swamps she penetrates; and all that wild and imagined country, with its luxurious growth of tangled, tropical vegetation; its palmetto, cypress, live oaks, ferns and other panorama of beauty, are unfolded to the interested reader, with the charm and brightness of the genius of this gifted novelist.

In Mam'selle, the wild flower of the bayou, reared in solitude and neglect, who never knew the sound of a loving mother's voice; who poured forth her whole heart and soul in a wild idolatrous love for the immortal *Shakespeare*, Mrs. E. Burke Collins has given to the world of literature, a creation which is a revelation and a delight. How subtle are the lights and shades with which she draws the young untutored heart of this

MODERN HEATHEN

striving blindly to find the light of Christianity and love. A heathen indeed!—poor Mam'selle—but blessed with the divine fire of *genius*, which will never be quenched,

"That burneth and liveth on forever."

It is the work of a master mind.

Mrs. E. Burke Collins, the author, is a little woman, who for some years lived quietly and worked diligently in her beautiful southern home on the Tangipahoa river, of Louisiana, has

awakened to *fame* and *fortune*. But young in years Mrs. E. Burke Collins has written over one hundred novels and thousands of short sketches and poems. A diligent, earnest worker is seen in the amount of good work she has accomplished, at one time working on four serials and writing five short sketches weekly. Gifted with a vivid imagination, a keenly observing mind, and a warm and sympathetic nature, her novels were promptly recognized by her publishers as possessing rare merit in depicting with a deft and master touch the real life of the Louisiana Pine Woods, which in "A MODERN HEATHEN" and "TONY" she has made her special study.

For over eight years her home was on the Tangipahoa river, whose verdant banks, fringed with spreading live oaks and cypress trees, their moss draped limbs waving in the gentle southern breezes, and whose reflected images were mirrored in the flowing stream.

Mrs. Collins is a very dilligent worker, and firmly believes in the benefit and elixir to be found in the open air and healthful exercise.

Up with the mocking birds she is often seen manning with deft skill, her boat, "*Mam'selle*," named after one of the pet children of her fertile brain—the heroine of

"A MODERN HEATHEN."

In her beautiful home in the Crescent city, far from the "bosky dells" of the pine woods, where she remained to learn the real life of that won-

derful country, she reaps the reward of her work, in the recognition of her genius, which must be very gratifying.

Wm. J. Benners, Jr., of Philadelphia, Pa., is the only publisher of Mrs. E. Burke Collins' new books. *All others are reprints of her old stories.*

THE CONSTANCE LIBRARY NO. 1.

A MODERN HEATHEN,

BY MRS. E. BURKE COLLINS.

Price 25 cents. Sold by all Newsdealers,

OR

WM. J. BENNERS, JR.,

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

E. BURKE COLLINS,

One of the Foremost Writers of America.

AUTHOR OF "A MODERN HEATHEN," "TONY," Etc., Etc.

E. BURKE COLLINS.

E. BURKE COLLINS is a native of Rochester, N. Y. She is a daughter of the late W. S. Brown. On the maternal side, she is a direct descendent of the Whiting family of Great Barrington, Mass., whose published geneaolgy traces the family back 600 years.

Conspicuous among her ancestors was the famous Capt. John Mason, whose valor saved from hostile savages the first settlers of Connecticut. In early chlidhood, she lost her excellent mother, who died young of consumption. The child was of a dreaming disposition, and from an early age evinced a taste for literature which was quite remarkable. Her first article was written at the age of nine. At fifteen she left school and married E. Burke Collins, a rising young lawyer of Rochester, and under his name, as a *nom de plume*, she still writes.

Shortly afterward they sought the milder climate of Louisiana where Mrs. Collins gained perfect health. Within a year after her arrival in Louisiana, by an accident, she was suddenly made a widow, among comparative strangers, and left almost alone in the world. Up to that time she had never known a want that wealth could not supply, but after the first shock of her grief had subsided, she saw that a struggle for subsistence was before her. She decided that the pen, which had previously been a pastime, should be a weapon to keep the wolf from the door. She conceived and executed the daring scheme of starting a purely literary journal in New Orleans.

It was a most unpropitious time and place for such an enterprise. She went into the composing-room and learned to set type; she attended to all the duties of the journalistic grind, she worked for victory.

But a few months convinced the girl journalist that her venture would not pay, and she discontinued it before her finances were exhausted. Though the journalistic venture did not pay, it gave her such

prestige in the literary world that applications to become a regular contributor poured in upon her from different publishers, and her literary success was assured. The amount of writing that she accomplishes in a given time is wonderful.

Now, and for ten years past, she has received a larger salary for her work than any other writer in the far South and larger than any official in the State. She has a beautiful home in New Orleans. Her success as a story writer has been phenomenal. She has contributed to nearly all the leading periodicals in the United States, writing in all ninety-six novels and serial stories, together with thousands of short stories and sketches, and poems. The very first time she appeared in print was at the age of twelve, when she wrote the following poem for the Rochester (N. Y.) *Daily Democrat:*

PEACE.

I care not what Fate has in store
To change my life;
My heart with care is tried no more—
Feels no more strife.

No more with sin shall I be vexed,
For I am free;
No more with trials here perplexed—
God loveth me.

In everything I see His hand,
And I rejoice;
In storms and calms, on sea or land,
I hear His voice.

'Tis He who bids my soul "be still"
And tumult cease;
He rescues me from every ill,
And He is peace.

E. Burke Collins' novelette, "A Gilded God," which deals with artist life in New Orleans, has had an immense sale, over 65,000 copies being sold within a week after its first issue. Her last novel,

A MODERN HEATHEN,

is destined to make its mark in the world of literature.

This is a story of life in the far South. Some of the scenes depict life in the Louisiana pine woods, while many are laid in New Orleans, the quaint, old "Crescent City," so filled with romance and beauty, and holding a subtle charm and fascination all its very own. The heroine, a young girl called Mam'selle, reared in the very heart of the back woods, with no advantages, and with no book but Shakespeare's plays, proves to be a born actress. The story goes to show that genius is inherited, and that a human creature once endowed with the divine spark, cannot fight against destiny; for

"Genius does what it *must*; talent does what it *can*."

There is a tinge of mystery in the story, which ends with a divine sacrifice on the part of the young heroine.

"**A Modern Heathen**" is drawn from life, and is one of the most fascinating novels of the season. Many of her books have been republished in England.

"**A Fallen Angel,**" "**The Silent Witness,**" "**Tony,**" "**A Girl's Mistake,**" "**My Love Constance,**" "**A Woman's Silence,**" and "**The Woman Tempted Me,**" are among her best novels.

E. Burke Collins has chosen as a special field for her pen, the pine forests of Louisiana. Here lives a class of people, simple and homely, who have never yet

been written up by the novelist. The authoress made her home there in a picturesque old house over a hundred years old, on the banks of the beautiful and romantic Tangipahoa River, where for many months she studied the habits and customs and the simple mode of life of the pine woods people.

Mrs. Collins has a mascot in the shape of a huge yellow cat, rejoicing in the name of Manuel—"Man" for short. This cat is said to be a present from a direct descendant of the famous pirate, Lafitte, of whose depredations the inhabitants of the Louisiana pine woods still love to tell. A chest of gold doubloons hidden away by the pirate was found at the foot of a large cypress tree, near River View, the beautiful country home of the authoress, on the wildly romantic Tangipahoa. "Man" makes his appearance in the cozy study of the New Orleans residence nearly every morning, and springing upon the capacious desk, strewn with papers, settles down for a long sleep, from which he seldom arouses until the ringing of the luncheon bell, when "Man" goes to the dining-room and laps his milk from a silver dish—his very own. The authoress misses "Man" whenever he fails to appear, and declares that when he is absent it is an "off-day" with her work.

E. Burke Collins believes in outdoor exercise, and takes long rides on the back of "Dixie," her beautiful horse, from the famous Blue Grass Country. She also loves driving, and her carriage horse "Kent," is a great favorite with the authoress. She can pull an oar with the best of her sex, and she enjoys an exhilarating spin on a bicycle.

Gifted with a vivid imagination and a warm and sympathetic nature, her novels were promptly recognized by her publishers as possessing rare merit of an emotional nature, and in depicting with true and heart-searching skill the real inner life of the creations of her fertile brain. There is an intensity to her plots, and her conversations are natural. Personally E. Burke Collins is a young woman of about medium height, with a pale complexion and blue grey eyes, which change with every varying emotion, from grey to blue and black. She has wavy dark brown hair. She is reserved, and not at all a society woman, preferring the fellowship of two or three kindred souls to the fashionable world outside her quiet home.

Her heart is filled with sweet sympathy toward her fellow women in the great struggle for existence, and she is very kindly interested in young writers, remembering keenly her early struggles and the lessons taught by them. It has developed her naturally womanly nature and broadened her mind and heart. Her mind seeks only the high and pure in life, and all noble purposes ; she hates deceit and underhandedness. But her retiring disposition hides her great depth and sincerity of character, known only to her few chosen friends ; for she has always avoided any ostentatious display or advertising notoriety, preferring her writing to be read and appreciated on their own merits. Her life holds many a sacrifice on the Altar of Duty. No lines describe her so well as these, by James Russell Lowell :—

Great feelings hath she of her own,
  Which lesser souls may never known;
God giveth them to her alone,
And sweet they are as any tone
  Wherewith the wind may chose to blow.

Yet in herself she dwelleth not,
  Although no home were half so fair,
No simplest duty is forgot,
Life hath no dim and lowly spot
  That doth not in her sunshine share.

She doeth little kindnesses,
  Which most leave undone, or despise:
For naught that sets one heart at ease,
And giveth happiness and peace,
  Is low—esteemed in her eyes.

Blessing she is: God made her so,
  And deeds of week-day holiness
Fall from her noiseless as the snow,
Nor has she ever chanced to know
  That aught were easier than to bless.

She is a woman: one in whom
  The springtime of her childish years
Hath never lost its fresh perfume,
Though knowing well that life hath room
  For many blights and many tears.

E. Burke Collins has been compared to Gertrude Atherton, Mary E. Wilkins, and to Miss Murfree (Charles Egbert Craddock), but her work has an individuality of its own, quite distinct from any other writer. She has made a fortune with her pen.

WILL J. BENNERS, JR.

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PUBLISHED BY

WILL. J. BENNERS, Jr.,

Room 11,

729 WALNUT STREET,

PHILADELPHIA, PA.

MAM'SELLE

A Modern Heathen.

THE 94TH NOVEL OF THE CELEBRATED SOUTHERN AUTHORESS,

E. BURKE COLLINS.

Author of "Tony, a Waif of the Louisiana Pine Woods," "My Love Constance," "The Silent Witness," "A Girl's Mistake," "A Gilded God," etc., etc.

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TO

WILL J. BENNERS JR.,

OF

PHILADELPHIA, PENN'A,

I DEDICATE

THIS SIMPLE, O'ER TRUE STORY

OF

A FAITHFUL HEART.

PREFACE.

I do not think that anything I can say by way of preface to my story, would express my meaning,—the *motif* of this book,—more clearly than these words from a contemporary writer:—

"Poor soul! She talked of heathens,—being herself the worst type of a heathen,—namely—a Christian heathen."

"I do not know what you mean by a heathen; but I cannot believe that God, who is so good, is going to everlastingly burn any body. It would hurt Him so much to see poor creatures writhing about in flames forever; *we* would not be able to bear it, and I am quite sure it would make Him miserable, even in Heaven, because, He is all Love; He says so. He *could not* be cruel.

"The journey heavenwards may be made by different roads, but the end,—the glory—the immortality is the same."

E. Burke Collins,
313 Valence St.,
New Orleans, La.

December 1st, 1894.

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MAM'SELLE,

A MODERN HEATHEN.

CHAPTER I.

MAM'SELLE.

A GOLDEN west all aflame with gorgeous colors; the sun slowly sinking out of sight, lingering to mirror itself upon the shining surface of the river which glided by, through the southern pine lands. The glittering lances of sunshine cast themselves in shining showers upon the crystal water, and a soft rosy flush, like a maiden's blush,—lay over all.

The dying sun rays streamed through the green and silent aisles of the forest, and found their way into tangled sweet-scented swamps, and shady nooks hidden away in forgotten corners. It gilded the old log cabin which stood on the edge of the swamp, and rested like a halo upon the uncovered head of a girl standing alone upon the river bank. An odd little figure in a queer, short gown,—coarse and patched, her bare brown feet visible beneath the scanty skirt. She stood at the foot of a huge water oak, leaning heavily against its

trunk, her arms,—from which the ragged sleeves fell back,—were lifted above her head, behind which her small hands were clasped tightly. She looked like a nymph or a dryad. A small, oval, colorless face, with immense brown eyes, long lashed and slumbrous, and a mass of jetty hair falling in an unkempt tangle far below her waist. A look of unchildlike sadness rested upon the young face which could not have seen more than fifteen years.

The moments came and went, but still the girl stood there, never moving, like a statue of silence. The sunset glories faded away from the western sky; the first faint gray of twilight began to steal slowly and tenderly over the earth; and at last the silence was broken. Tramp—tramp—the sound of heavy footfalls upon the bare brown path which led from the swamp where the wild rose was lighting its crimson lamps in the thicket. The girl turned her head at sound of the footsteps and a swift look of terror flashed over the dark mobile face. Around a bend in the pathway a man was coming in sight; an old man, bent and decrepit, white-haired and weather-beaten. A typical Arcadian in rough homespun garb, great coarse boots, and an uncouth fur cap upon his shaggy head, although it was an April evening. An ugly, repulsive creature, outgrowth of the lowest strata of humanity, with a face that mirrored all the evil passions of the human heart;

cruelty, selfishness, greed and avarice. Hard, harsh, coarse and brutal; a man from whom a little innocent child would shrink instinctively.

Upon his stooping shoulders he carried a gun; at his heels half a dozen gaunt hounds were stalking, though keeping well out of range of his vision, as though expecting to be treated to a kick from the hob-nailed boots. As the evil eyes of the old man fell upon the girl, he frowned ominously and came to a halt. The dogs halted also, and stood submissively and respectfully awaiting the movements of the master who was so very slightly elevated in the scale of humanity—above themselves.

"*You!*" he cried wrathfully, shaking his fist at the girl,—a huge fist which looked like tanned leather, so hard, and brown and ugly it was,—"*you*, Mam'selle! What for you no go to de house and make your work? What for you stan' here und' de tree, and do nothing? *Nevair* weel you be goot for nothing, you beggar!" Spitting forth the epithet, as though it were venom.

"Go!" he added, threateningly, menacing her with his clinched fist.

The girl called *Mam'selle* (was it in irony?) started nervously, and a swift shudder ran over her childish form; a shudder that was as much repulsion as fear; and yet she was afraid of him,—horribly afraid. Then, a look of resolution crept over the mobile features; the folded arms

dropped to her sides; she advanced a step toward the old man.

"Grand père!" Her voice was low and sweet, and very plaintive; "I have finished my work for the day! See my hands, they are all blistered. Since day-break, I have been at work. I milked the cows, prepared breakfast, put the house in order then, I took my hoe and went out into the field, where I worked all day long with the—negroes," (a thrill of passionate protest in the sweet young voice), "at sundown I stopped, and came homeward. I found it cool and sweet here and—I wanted—to—speak with you, so I waited for you to come!"

The old man placed his gun against a tree, and turned to glance into the girl's face, with sudden curiosity.

"*You* want for to—spik—with *me*?" he queried sharply—"*que voulez vous*?"

"This."

The girl's slim figure straightened itself; the big dark eyes flashed, the sweet voice was clear and resonant. There were wonderful possibilities in that voice.

"You have taken away my book; I *know* it was you," as the old man shook his head in swift denial. "It is all I have to care for in the world, my Shakespeare. Father Andrea gave it to me, and it has been my only pleasure on earth! But, because I read in it at night, when my tasks are

done,—and I do not take one hour of time from the work I do for you,—you have stolen it! Yes, it *is* stealing," as the old man sprang forward his right hand uplifted as though to strike her—"for it is mine! And oh, grand père if only you will give it back to me, I will promise not to read, or waste my time at night any more, until the crop is all worked. Give it to me—*please* grand père!"

Clasping the small, brown blistered hands with a gesture of beseeching. The old man's evil eyes fell for an instant.

"You weel not keep your word!" he growled. "You weel waste your time to read! Dat is von book of de diable! *Père* Andrea was von vaire bad man, he burn now in hell-fire—he burn for evair! He learn you all you know,—to read and study—to read de bad play books half de night! You not read your prayer book *nevair!* Nor weel you give one candelle to de saints. Sometime dey weel harm you, for you be so bad! You nevair say no prayers, like von goot Cattolique! You no follow your religion; ah—*bah!* you no goot at all!"

The girl's short upper lip curled scornfully; "No, I am not!" she made answer bravely. "And when I see such men as *you* reading the prayers, and following the forms, I want to be out of it! Besides, why should I pray? The saints never answer my prayers; and God does not care for such a nobody as I!"

The old man's wrinkled face grew purple with wrath.

"So!" he panted, angrily, "Père Andrea learn you dat! Vair well! he is dead,--de bad ole man! All de bad you know, you git from him!"

All the *good*,—everything!" cried the girl vehemently. "He was my only friend on earth. He taught me to read and write, and to speak properly. And he gave me the Shakespeare. It was all he had to give, for he was very poor! He was too good and honest to be rich. He said that it is not a bad book, for it tells the *truth*. But he is dead and gone,—dead and gone forever, and I am all alone! He was my only friend,—the only person who understood me; my only friend, yet the God you say is so good—you say also has taken him away. He is *not* good to me, for he has taken my only friend, and I am alone—alone!"

She flung herself upon the grass in a paroxysm of grief; weeping--sobbing in a perfect storm of passion and despair,—painful to witness in one so young.

Just then, the bent form of an old woman appeared at the door of the cabin a few yards distant, and made its way slowly and laboriously to the spot. A horrible old creature,—ugly, wrinkled, repulsive. Her trembling hands grasped a heavy staff, and she muttered between her toothless jaws as she walked.

"*Bêtise!*" she muttered, harshly—"to waste time on *dat!*" Nodding her head sagely in the direction of the weeping girl. She hobbled over to the prostrate figure upon the grass, and spurned it with her heavy foot, encased in a clumsy wooden shoe.

"Fool!" shrieked the old hag—"git you up—or—"

The girl arose to her feet with a stifled cry; and, like a beautiful wild thing at bay stood confronting the pair.

"Now, listen to me!" she panted, catching her breath hard, like one in pain, not altogether physical; "I will make a bargain with you two—a bargain! Yes, even I! You are compelled to make terms with the negroes who work your crops—but I—I am your unpaid servant, your unthanked slave, your drudge—your beast of burden! You have more pity on the mules that plough in your fields than you have upon me. I receive no pay—I ask none. I want only the one thing in the world that belongs to me—the book that my only friend gave me—and he is dead. Grand père, return the book to me at once, and I will agree to go on with the field work—all the drudgery—as before. But, refuse, and—"

"And what den?" interrupted the old man, grasping her roughly by the shoulders; "say—what *den?*" The girl's dark eyes met his with a fearless glance.

"I will run away—that's all!" she cried, boldly. "And you will have to find a drudge—a *slave*—in my place."

"Give her de book," snarled the old woman, viciously; "dat all *she* goot for! She von fool—de *Actor's brat!*" she added, malignantly.

The girl wheeled swiftly about, and caught one of the old crone's hard wrinkled hands in a desperate grasp; "Grand mère—tell me! You always call me that, when you are angry with me! What do you mean by it? Why am I without a name save Mam'selle? Even grand père's dogs have their own names, and know them, but I have none!"

But, the old woman only wrenched her knotty hand from the grasp of the slight fingers, and leaning heavily upon her stick, moved slowly away.

The old man turned to the girl,—"Bah," he hissed, malignantly, "you make no more questions. You sall have de book, but you keep de word, you make your work, and no fool away your time. Now go to de house and make you de *petit souper*. When de work all done you sall have de book!"

Slowly she moved away, up the river bank, and disappeared within the cabin; a look was on the small grave face which was not good to see.

Who was Mam'selle? Nobody seemed to know, and nobody cared. She had grown up in the southern pine lands under the iron rule of her

grand parents, but no one seemed to know aught concerning her father or her mother. The few among the rude backwoods people who suspected, were too indifferent to trouble themselves in regard to the matter. The girl was as utterly ignorant of the ways of the world which lay outside the green pine woods, as though the real world were bounded by the sentinel pines, and beyond was only chaos. She knew absolutely nothing of any life save life in the backwoods, and the drudgery to which she was accustomed. Her only friend had been an aged man who had lived a mile away—Father Andrea he was called,—though he had never taken holy orders. He had felt a great interest in the child, and had long ago taught her to read and write; but he had—perhaps unwisely—fostered her love of the ideal. Discovering in the girl a wonderful aptitude, which looked like a natural talent, he had allowed her to become familiar with Shakespeare's plays, and before he died, he had given into her keeping the one book in his possession—a worn and faded copy of Shakespeare.

Mam'selle treasured it and loved it as though it were a sentient thing. Does this seem unnatural? To be cut off from all others of your kind in the depths of a lonely forest, to drag out your life day after day in unceasing, uncongenial toil, with only a *book* for friend and companion; who would not learn to love and depend upon it? Ah! here

was a friend who would never betray. It was her fetich—her idol; she loved it because she had nothing else to care for; and, alas, for poor Mam'selle's future well being,—hers was a nature which demanded *something* to love!

Two hours later, worn out with the long day's toil, and faint with the reaction after all the excitement through which she had passed, Mam'selle crept slowly up the rude stairs which led to her room in the loft of the cabin. Such a room as the poorest outcast would scarcely crave to be sheltered in; but to-night it was a welcome retreat to the tired young bond slave. And in her arms, clasped close to her sore, rebellious little heart, she held the precious Shakespeare.

In one corner of the room, there was a clumsy wooden crucifix; before it, the kneeling figure of a Magdalene, and upon the rude shrine, a single tallow candle burned dimly. Mam'selle glanced toward the Magdalene, with piteous eyes.

"You are my patron saint, so grand père tells me," she said, aloud, slowly and sadly. "I must pray to you, he says, and make offerings at your shrine. I have promised him to do so, and I will keep my word. But, if you had not answered my prayer," her eyes flashing, "and given me back my book, I would never have believed in you again."

This was her conception of religion, a material religion; the literal granting of a literal prayer;

it was all the religion that she knew. Does this seem unnatural also, in an enlightened age?

Still clasping the book in her arms, without a prayer or preparation, the poor little heathen crept into her miserable bed, and soon forgot her sorrows in sleep.

CHAPTER II.

ALARIC BRANDON.

ALARIC BRANDON had lost his way.

"Pleasant prospect truly!" he cried, as he stretched his long limbs, and peered anxiously through the gathering shadows, up and down the bank of the river; "alone in the pine woods, and night not far off, and a storm brewing, or I miss my guess! This comes of getting so pre-occupied with one's work, as to forget the flight of time."

He was a tall, graceful man of some thirty years, with deep dark eyes and a weary looking face. In one hand he held a portfolio filled with closely written sheets of manuscript; he had been writing busily under the overhanging branches of a huge catalpa tree, and had only been aroused from his absorption in his work, by the sudden disappearance of the sun. He had attempted to retrace his footsteps, back to the house where he had secured temporary quarters, and like most strangers who make such an attempt, in the pine woods, had succeeded in getting lost.

"I declare, I believe I hear the sound of oars!" exclaimed the young man, eagerly, after a pause, "well, it *would* be good luck if a boat should come this way, and its occupant consent to row me back

to old Roger's quarters. Ah, yes, it *is* a boat coming round the bend!"

He was leaning forward now, his eyes fixed eagerly upon a point up-stream.

"Here it comes in sight. By Jove!" in a tone of disappointment. "Nobody in it, but a *girl!* Well," after a swift survey of the little craft and its occupant, "I'll have to throw myself upon her mercy. So, here goes!"

Putting his hand to his mouth, and sending forth a shrill penetrating *halloa!* The girl in the boat turned her eyes full upon the solitary figure standing upon the river bank, sharply outlined like a *silhouette* against the background of grey sky. At that instant the departing sun shot forth a farewell gleam—a sudden flash of glory—a golden radiance which illumined the scene as with a shower bath of gold. It lit up the face of the man upon the river bank, and transfigured it. Never to the day she died, did Mam'selle forget that picture.

"Come here,—if you please!" he called, loudly —"I have lost my way—and—"

She had already turned the boat about, and was heading for the point where he stood. A moment later, Alaric Brandon was holding the chain, while he poured forth a voluble explanation of his sad plight; lost in the forest, and not knowing where to go.

Mam'selle listened, too unused to the ways of the world to find any embarrassment in her position.

"Certainly, monsieur," she said, quickly, "get into my boat, and I will take you to old Roger's. Or, you might stay to-night, if you liked, at grand père's—it is nearer. He sometimes accommodates strangers, though the accommodations are poor."

"Do *you* live there?" he asked, eagerly. Her face darkened.

"I stay there, monsieur—yes, to be sure! I have no other place."

Something in the low passionate voice touched the young man with an odd feeling of interest in the forlorn little creature before him. It was a new sensation to blasè Alaric Brandon. He turned with a swift glance of inquiry, "Where have I seen your face before?" he asked, abruptly. She shook her head.

"You have never seen me until to-night, monsieur," she returned, simply. "I have lived here in the woods always. I have never spoken to a grand gentleman in my life, until now!"

His face flushed. The innocent flattery was not without a subtle attraction. The world-weary man, tired of the adulation of fashionable women, found something strangely interesting in this dark-eyed young savage.

"Get into the boat," she repeated, in her low, clear, vibrant voice, "and sit quite still, if you please. Oh, no—no—you need not take an oar! I can row very well; I am used to it, and it is all down stream, you see. It is not two miles quite,

and the current will take us along. It is almost drifting."

"What were you doing on the water at this hour?" he asked, when he and his portfolio were safely ensconced within the boat.

"Setting hooks for the night!" she returned, simply. "Grand père sends me out sometimes, to fasten the big fish hooks, all baited, to the over-hanging branches of trees and bushes in the still, deep pools where the fish usually stay. Then, in the morning, before sunrise, he rows up in the boat, and almost always finds fish upon every line, *big* fish too! They catch themselves you see monsieur, and when the bait is good, it never fails!"

"Like unwary mortals," smiled Alaric Brandon, "just so *we* are caught. I suppose there are 'set hooks' of the evil one hidden in various unsuspected places, waiting even now, for me."

She laughed aloud at the conceit, and for the first time, their eyes met. A swift, sharp, pang shot through the girl's heart. Something hurt her—something that had never hurt her before.

"You were writing," she ventured, timidly, after a pause; "I saw you sitting under a catalpa tree, when I passed on up the river. You were so busy you never saw the boat go by."

"I was!" he laughed, "you see, young lady—by the way, if it's a fair question, what is your name?" Her face flushed. "Mam'selle, that is all the name I have, monsieur. We are Arca-

dians. I have neither father nor mother. I live with grand père and grand mère, and—I hate them. Now—tell me *your* name, monsieur."

He was quite silent, staring into the dark, *piquante* face in blank surprise at her vehemence.

"My name?" starting suddenly, "oh yes—to be sure, it is Alaric Brandon." She smiled.

"I like it!" she said, simply.

"Have you ever heard it before?" he asked.

She shook her head decidedly, "No, monsieur, I never hear of anything except the crops, and the timber trade; or when some man beats his wife, or somebody's baby dies. The grown people I believe *never* die; they just shrivel up and live forever, I fancy." He laughed aloud.

"Truly, this is Arcadia," he exclaimed, in amusement; "and that last remark recalls Haggard's 'She.' I asked if you had ever heard my name," he went on, swiftly, "because, I fancied that you might have read some of my yarns. I am a story and play-writer you see, Mam'selle, (Jove! the name suits you, down to the ground:) and having worked too hard, my health began to suffer, and my physician ordered quiet, and the healthful air of the pine woods. So I came out here, found a boarding place, such as it is, with old Roger, and here I am, working away at my play, the great play which is to make me famous and bring me fortune some day. Are you fond of reading, Mam'selle?" breaking off abruptly.

The great, dark eyes met his with a solemn look in their grave depths; "I have never read any books but Shakespeare's plays," she said.

He threw back his handsome head and laughed aloud, a clear musical laugh which did one good to hear.

"Shakespeare! Shades of antiquity! In the name of all modern poets and novelists I protest! Ah—I beg your pardon, Mam'selle." His eyes taking in the grieved look which overspread her changing features; "I meant no disrespect, but it is so very unusual to hear a young lady profess a taste for Shakespeare *exclusively*."

"But I have no other book, monsieur, and I want no other. I love it. It is full of grand and noble thoughts; and I *act* the parts that suit me best. You see I—I have to work hard, work like a slave from morning till night, until I am completely exhausted; if I do not keep at my task, grand père beats me!"

"Good Heavens!"

"It is true," her face flushing crimson, "but after the work is all done, and night comes, *then* is my time! I creep away up-stairs to my own room under the roof, and there I am happy. There, alone in the darkness, I *act* the plays that I have read, act them out, as old Father Andrea explained them to me, the ones that I love best, all alone, with no one to sneer at me. Then, I am Ophelia, and Cordelia, and Portia. I do not care

so much for the others, only those inspire me. I *feel* them, monsieur, *here*." Laying one small brown hand upon her breast, "monsieur!" she added, thoughtfully, "if it were not for my Shakespeare, my only friend, do you know what I would do?"

He shook his head glancing curiously into her face as he did so. "What, my child."

"Well," her breast rising and falling with suppressed passion, "grand père took the book from me yesterday, and I had to threaten to run away, before he would give it back to me. If he takes it again, and destroys it, as he says he will, I shall just run down to the river and jump in, and put an end to it all. It may seem very small and trifling to you, monsieur, all this—but, remember, I have nothing else in the whole world! Nothing else on earth that belongs to me!"

He reached out his hand, shapely and well-formed, and laid it upon the small brown one which held the oar; "My poor child!" he said, softly, "I pity you!"

"Don't!" Her eyes flashed into his. "I want nobody's pity, monsieur. I shall get out of this some day. I was not born to die in this lonely place. But, never mind me, you—you—say you write books. Tell me about them." His eyes drooped.

"Yes," slowly, "I write books; but they are not like your Shakespeare. They are not great!"

"Then, why write them? I would never do any thing, unless it could be of the best!"

"One writes to earn one's bread and butter," he said, evasively.

"Do you?" she replied, eagerly, "do your books really bring you bread and butter? How nice that must be! it must be so grand to make one's own living." He smiled sarcastically.

"Oh, well, writing books will furnish *bread*," he returned, "and when one is young and strong, one can do without butter. We poor writers have to take our chances in the arena. And sometimes, Mam'selle, the men to whom we sell the books when written, have been known to absorb the work of one's brain and pen, and give no return for it."

Her eyes grew large and dark, with wondering surprise.

"But," she protested, helplessly, "that is *stealing*, monsieur! does not the law punish those wicked men?" He laughed harshly.

"The law punishes the thief who may steal your purse, Mam'selle, or the burglar that enters your house to rob it, but for the work of brain and intellect, the hard, hard toil which those who have never accomplished it, can never comprehend, there is no protection."

"Then, I would not write at all!" she said, decidedly. "I would break stones in the streets to earn my bread, before I would let the work of

my brain be stolen from me! Monsieur, out in your world, where I have never been,—is there no justice?" He sighed.

"Very little I fear!" he returned. "It is said that justice sleeps; but sometimes, I think that it is dead."

Then, after a pause, during which the boat drifted slowly down the stream, with the gentle current, he went on softly:—

"Mam'selle! What an odd name to be sure! Pardon me,—but I wonder why you are called so?" She shook her head.

"I do not know!" she said, sullenly, "it is like a name one gives to a dog or a cat!"

"But," he said, perplexedly, "you have a surname surely?"

She averted her face: and even the small brown throat was crimson with the burning blushes which overspread it.

"I do not know! Grand père says I am not worth one. It is a wonder that he doesn't just *whistle* for me when he wants me, as he whistles for his dogs; I am a nobody, he says—'*N'être bon â rien!*' (Not good for any thing!) Then, why does he keep me?" catching her breath with a suppressed sob. "It is because I do the work of two; because I am a drudge,—a servant,—a field hand—everything low and common! I toil from morning until night; then I creep up to my bed in the dark. Half the time a beating from grand

père is my only good-night. I lie down and think, and think; oh, monsieur, I think until my head hurts me; then I arise, and if I can steal a bit of candle off the altar (we are all good Catholics, and each has his altar and crucifix to pray to!) I light it, and get my Shakespeare and read, and read, and *then* I forget all my troubles. Monsieur, I should like some day, to act those grand plays upon a real stage."

Her voice rang out clear and sweet, her great dark eyes were luminous; she half arose in the boat. But at that moment its keel grated upon the sand, and then for the first time, she realized that they were home.

She led the way to the log cabin, Alaric Brandon following her like one in a maze, bewildered by this girl's intensity, and the *genius* which that one tragic gesture had betrayed.

The old people were quite willing to receive the young man for the night, when he assured them that he would remunerate them well. Refusing supper, Alaric Brandon followed his host into a decently furnished bed chamber, and half an hour later, had retired, but he could not sleep.

He was haunted by a small pale face, with great, wistful dark eyes gazing into his own, while a voice, wondrously sweet and melodious, whispered in his ear:—

"Arise!" it said in solemn accents, "*I am Fate!*"

CHAPTER III.

A PROPHECY.

And Mam'selle? Alone in her bare little attic, she walked straight to the crucifix in the corner, and lighting a candle placed it upon the rude altar. Her empty little heart was thrilling yet with the memory of the dark eyes which had gazed kindly into her own, and the sweet low voice which took on a caressing tone whenever it addressed her. It was something utterly astounding and new to her, completely foreign to her whole life; the courteous kindness of this man of the world, who would have treated even a negro washerwoman with respect. It had sunk into her heart, the gentle kindliness, which he would probably go his way to-morrow and forget; and Mam'selle was quite dazed, and mentally blinded.

For a time she stood in silence before the crucifix, gazing upon it with wide open eyes, which did not see the holy symbol. They saw instead, a grave, handsome face, with great, dark eyes, and curling brown lashes, and the curves of a sweet sad mouth; saw only the face of Alaric Brandon, instead of the thorn crowned head upon the cross.

Alas! poor Mam'selle was not the first of her sex who has turned from sacred things to gaze upon some erring mortal, and can see naught else but one perfect face! Who gropes in the darkness from the man God, to the man who is her god alone; too often, an idol formed of clay. For a time she stood in silence, her ignorant little heart filled with a strange new delight and rapture; then with a swift impulsive movement, she fell upon her knees before the cross, and pressed her lips reverently upon the ugly wooden image of the Magdalene.

"Thank you," she said, softly; in her eyes a great awe slowly kindling, "you are very good to me now; you have given me back my book; and —and—I asked you to let some one speak a kind word to me just once, and you have done so! I am very grateful! I will vow a pound of candles to the good St. Mary Magdalene! You are my patron saint, they tell me; I wonder why? Yes, I will give you a whole pound of candles, though I shall have to work my fingers nearly to the bone to earn them. But if I *do*, you will be kind to me always, will you not?"

In awed silence she waited for the answer, which grand père had assured her would surely be vouchsafed to "a good Catholic." "You *will* be kind to me?" she repeated, in an agony of doubt and fear. But no answer came from the rude wooden image.

"I am not good enough for her to answer me!" whispered Mam'selle, sadly, as she rose from her knees; "I am too bad, and St. Mary Magdalene will not listen to me! I will do penance. To-morrow I will eat nothing but bread and water; and I will try—try hard, by working night and day, to earn the candles; and perhaps then, she will relent and answer me. Oh! would it not be *grand*, if she would open her lips and speak with me here alone in this room, at night, when everybody is asleep?"

She went over to the one window, and threw open the wooden shutter. A flood of moonlight streamed into the wretched room. It fell athwart the crucifix, and the thorn crowned head rudely carven thereon. The pale silvery moon rays seemed to endow the anguished features with life. The painted blood drops upon the cheeks and breast of the image, seemed *real*. The cowering Magdalene, to the wondering eyes of the superstitious child, seemed to tremble and prostrate itself still lower. A strange terror crept over her, and made her afraid. She crossed herself devoutly.

"From all evil, O Lord, deliver us!" she whispered, fearfully, striving vaguely to recall more of the agonized supplications of the Litany; as she fell upon her knees once more before the crucifix and the altar.

"St. Mary Magdalene, pray for us! St. Agnes,

pray for us! St. Lucy, pray for us! St.—*oh!*" (in a tone of bitter disappointment) "I cannot remember any more! And I do *so* want to be good! I never really wanted to be good before in my life! But, St. Mary Magdalene will intercede for me, I know! What beautiful eyes he has! And oh, how kindly he spoke to me, and in such a sweet voice. Alaric Brandon! what a pretty name! How nice it must be to have a real name of one's own! If only I were *somebody*, and not nameless and friendless, I believe I could be good!"

It was the first stirring of the divine instinct within the lonely little heart; the first real reaching out of a desolate soul, groping in the dark for a guiding hand. Never before in her forlorn young life had the child longed so earnestly for *light;* for guidance; for a pure existence. She felt more keenly than ever the baseness of her lot, the sordid toil, the coarse surroundings. Never before had she felt so deeply the sharp pang of her debased condition, never until Alaric Brandon's beautiful dark eyes had met her own, and within her childish breast a slow dull pain stirred blindly into being, nevermore to be laid at rest.

She had seated herself upon a rush bottomed chair beside the open window. She rested her weary arms upon the sill, and the small dusky head pillowed itself upon them. Her great dark

eyes sought the moon-drenched swamp, where the night birds were calling shrilly across the silence; and once in a while, a grave old owl shouted a hoarse "*tu whoo!*" A strange unrest crept into the girl's heart.

"I wonder what is the matter with me?" the child whispered, half fearfully. "I feel as though something is going to happen!"

Ah, that something which comes to every woman sooner or later; and to hearts like this poor untaught child's, it comes as a black, bitter curse.

Mam'selle's eyes closed wearily, and sleep touched her eyelids with its magic wand. Clouds obscured the face of the moon; the wind arose with a shrill shriek, and closed the wooden shutter; but still Mam'selle slept on. The clouds gathered fast and faster, and the rain began to patter slowly down upon the roof. Still, Mam'selle slept on. Tired nature had given way, and was exacting its just dues.

She awoke with a sudden start. A gust of wind had loosened the shutter once more; it had swung open, and the rain was drifting in upon the bowed head, and the bare brown arms folded beneath it. Mam'selle started up.

"So! It is raining! Grand père will be very angry if it rains to-morrow, because the crops are not 'laid by,' and too much rain will hurt them! But, oh!" with a little thrill of delight as she re-

membered the handsome stranger, "if it rains, *he* cannot go away to-morrow!"

She closed and fastened the shutter, then crept away to bed, a strange content pervading her whole being.

In its gloomy corner, where the single tallow candle was slowly guttering down in the brass candlestick, the figure of the Magdalene crouching before the cross looked dim and indistinct in the faint gleam of wavering yellow light. It seemed to grow and expand, and become lifelike, as it crouched there at the feet of the pitying One, its head in the dust, the long hair hiding the shamed face.

"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven her; for she loved much."

Whose was the voice that breathed those words of divine compassion and forgiveness? Ah! the suffering One upon the cross could forgive and pity; but the Pharisees who arraign, and would mete out punishment just and fitting, they say instead:—"Go! you have sinned. There is no pardon—no hope; only the doom of the sinner!"

And, ignorant of the tragedy which connected the Magdalene with her own young life, Mam'selle slept on.

In the grey of the early dawn, the door of the attic room was pushed rudely open, and old grand mère with her oaken stick in hand hobbled slowly to the side of the sleeping girl.

"Get you up!" she commanded, harshly, "eet is pass daylight, and eet rain—rain—rain! You *hear?* Eet rain to-day, and de corn not yet hoed, and de potato weel be drown! Get you up—*you!* and go to work!"

Slowly—sullenly—the girl obeyed the harsh command. Plunging her face into a tin basin of water, she performed her ablutions, bound up her wealth of dark hair in a heavy coil, and struggled into a homespun gown, grand mère's hard eyes upon every movement.

"You no say your prayer?" snarled the old crone, as the girl was about to descend the narrow staircase to her morning tasks in the little, hot, close kitchen below. "You von bad ting—you—Magdalene! *Dat* you be one day *certainement!*"

"Why?"

Mam'selle wheeled swiftly about and faced the old woman with a resolute face; "Now, I want to know," she panted, wrathfully, "who was Mary Magdalene, grand mère? I want to know all about her—if she is my patron saint?"

The old crone laughed a horrible laugh; "Een goot time you weel know!" she cried, harshly. "Now, git you below to your work! Monsieur weel wish for de *déjeûner*. When dat ees done, den I know not what you *weel* do, since de good St. Swithin sees fit to send us de rain before de time! Eet weel spoil de crop—dat all!"

"Then, why don't you pray to him to keep

back the rain for the present?" asked the girl, eagerly. "You say the crops will perish with too much rain, and since—as you say—it is all in his hands, why I should insist upon dry weather! You and grand père depend upon the crops for a living, and as you are such good Catholics, the saint ought to take pity on two old people, and make the rain stop! If he will not, he has no care for you, and I wouldn't have anything to do with him! Ah! *I* know why he will not answer your prayers! You are too *bad*!" And with a light, mocking laugh she disappeared down the narrow staircase which led to regions below.

Out on the long low gallery she encountered Alaric Brandon. He was standing in a listless attitude, gazing down the river with blank unseeing eyes; lulling thought and fancy with the sweet, low lullaby of the pattering rain drops, coming down in ceaseless rhythm upon the drooping eaves. He started at sight of the girl.

"Ah! good morning, Mam'selle!" he cried, pleasantly; "and did you sleep well last night?"

"Did *you*, monsieur?" His face flushed.

"Hardly. I have so many odd fancies, and my play weighs heavily upon my mind at times. Should you like me to read it to you, Mam'selle? Oh! there's no hope of my getting away to-day; for this rain evidently means business, and has come to stay! I shall be shut up here, like a rat

in a trap. And you too, you will not be able to go out."

"The crops are going to be drowned, grand mère says!" interposed Mam'selle, audaciously, lowering her voice however, lest it reach grand mère's listening ears. "For *my* part, I hope they will. I *hate* crops and field work, and—all that."

Alaric's eyes were full of sympathy—dangerous as the poison sweet of the Mancanilla flower which *kills* while it intoxicates with delight.

"I am glad for your sake!" he said, in that sweet seductive voice which had thrilled many a woman's heart before now; "we shall have a long day together. I will read my play to you, and you shall act your favorite characters from Shakespeare! Who knows, Mam'selle, but that *I* shall write a play some day—for *you?*"

She flashed swiftly about like a bird, and gave him one look—such a look! The dusky splendor of her glorious eyes fairly startled him. He was astonished at the betrayal of the possibilities of her nature. What manner of woman or child was this? Reared in the back woods, without one glimpse of the world beyond, but with the deathless fire of *genius* burning in her breast. Yet genius is a lurid flame, which ofttimes destroys all in its pathway, leaving only desolation in its wake.

That day! That day of days! Its influence sunk into Mam'selle's lonely little heart, like foot-

prints in the snow. When the household tasks were over, the strange incongruous pair seated themselves in a secluded corner of the long gallery. Grand mère sat knitting before the kitchen fireplace, and grand père, tired out with cursing the weather, smoked his ugly cob pipe on the other side of the wide-mouthed chimney, and the two young people were alone. Only the the sweet face of nature to gaze upon. To them—

"It was summer with bees in the air."

In the great live oak near by, a mocking bird, heedless of the falling rain, was giving a morning concert, as they sat under the clambering wisteria which drooped its fragrant purple plumes from the overhanging eaves of the ugly old house. Alaric Brandon opened his portfolio; then all the world changed to Mam'selle. Life put on a new meaning, and the earth became a very different place.

She listened with her soul in her eyes, while he read in that sweet, soft, seductive voice, the work of his own brain, the play upon which he was expending his best energies. She listened with clasped hands, and bated breath, and great, dark eyes fastened upon the handsome, manly face; scarcely moving or breathing, until at last, moved by the *silence*, he glanced up.

"*Mam'selle!*" starting in real alarm. "Why—my child! *don't* look like that! You look as if

you *felt* it all! As my heroine herself might be expected to look and feel!"

She shivered slightly, and one small hand was pressed upon her heart. "So I do, monsieur!" she said, simply. "Of course, how can one help it? Oh! monsieur!" Clasping and unclasping the small brown hands with nervous gestures, "what you have written, *is all true;* I feel it, know it! You write like Shakespeare!"

He checked the swift inclination to laugh, which threatened to disturb his equilibrium. He understood. He knew that to her, there could be no higher praise accorded him. "Now—let me hear you recite!" he said, kindly, yet secretly shrinking from the thought of the *disillusion* which surely must follow, when this rude, untaught actress should display her conception of the histrionic art.

"Very well, monsieur!" she said, gravely, "I will do my best! You know I have never seen a real play—or *anything* outside the pine woods! One can only do one's best you know," she added, apologetically.

* * * * * *

An hour later, Alaric Brandon arose to his feet, passing his hand over his brow, as though to clear a mist from his brain. Was he awake—or dreaming? For one hour—sixty whole moments—he had been with Ophelia—Portia—Cordelia. It

was not *acting*—it was simply real. The girl was a tragedy queen in embryo. Utterly ignorant and devoid of any knowledge as to her art, but simply portraying the characters represented in the immortal plays, as they appeared to her untrained immagination. It was wonderful! "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed, as he stepped out into the rain for a moment, to cool his heated brow, "the girl is superb! A true actor,—*born*, not *made*. The day will come when she will rival Bernhardt; and she has what Bernhardt has not —she has youth and freshness, and the fatal dower of beauty! She is of the sort that nothing will daunt, nothing stand in the way of her career! Such force, such pathos, such tragedy are latent in her nature! What a future lies before her; it makes me tremble to think of it. With such a nature, such *hero worship*, she will make or mar her whole life. Ten years from now, this girl will have the world at her feet—or" (a strange sadness touching his heart for a moment) "she will be a lost, ruined creature."

CHAPTER IV.

"SOMETHING ELSE BESIDES SHAKESPEARE."

THE day faded into nightfall—to the slow music of the falling rain. When it rains south of Mason and Dixon's line, there is seldom any half way about it. It is apt to linger until worn out with the ceaseless drip—drip—drip, poor miserable humanity, sick with the craving for clear skies and sunshine, is fain to cry out—"hold! enough!" Night came on, damp and chill and cheerless. Mam'selle bore great armfuls of light wood knots into the humble sitting-room, and piling them up on the broad hearth, soon had a fire and a light, which rivalled the gleaming gas lights of which she had never even heard. The bright blaze redeemed the sordid interior of the room, and the warmth was not unpleasant, thought Alaric Brandon, as sitting in a low rush bottomed chair in a shadowy corner, he beckoned to Mam'selle to share his retreat. She glanced swiftly in the direction of grand père. He was nodding like a Chinese mandarin, on the opposite side of the hearth. Wet weather had always a depressing effect upon grand père, and he spent most of his time, while it rained, in slumber.

The old woman was absorbed in her knitting; her wrinkled face, bent closely over it, the shining needles clicking sharply between her knotty, toil hardened fingers, as she went on in the weary rounds of the coarse cotton sock that she was knitting.

The coast looked clear. Mam'selle stole swiftly over to Alaric's side, and seated herself upon a hard wooden stool at his feet.

"Mam'selle!"

The young man's voice was too low to reach the deaf ears of grand mère. "I have been thinking of you to-day a great deal."

The dark eyes were uplifted shyly to his face, then drooped again. "Why, monsieur?"

"I have been thinking that you ought to learn something new, something more than Shakespeare, I mean! Oh! I acknowledge his greatness, Mam'selle!" as she started with a swift expression of protest flashing over her speaking face, "but there are other writers that you should know. By the way—the old man to whom you owe your education, must have been greatly superior to the other people in this out of the way place. *You* are actually the only person whom I have met here, who knows how to speak even partially correct English." The dark eyes grew luminous at his words of praise.

"Father Andrea was the only *good* man here!" she said, simply; "but no one liked him, no one

cared for him—only I, and I am nobody," with a slight laugh, which sounded a little bitter.

"You see, monsieur, he had once been intended for a priest, down in the big city yonder, the city of New Orleans; but he changed his mind, and never took holy orders, because he said he did not believe in it. So, the people hereabouts (we are all good Catholics, monsieur) turned against him, and treated him badly. They would have driven him away from the pine woods, I think, if they had dared. But he was kind and good, and never harmed any one, not a living soul. He would not crush a worm in his path; and the people here said that he was in league with the evil one, because he would not slay every living thing he met that was looked upon as venomous;—such things as snakes and adders, you know. But he said that they were harmless when let alone, and that their fangs and stings were only weapons given them by a kind God, to defend themselves—otherwise helpless—from the attacks of human beings. And we are so much larger and greater, and endowed with minds and reasoning powers, that old Father Andrea used to say it was cruel in a man—a great grown man—to crush a tiny reptile in his path, just because he was stronger, and able to do it. But oh, how everybody in the country hated him, because he was not like them. Monsieur, he was a grand old man. He had such a grave, pale face, and sad, blue eyes, and snow

white hair. So gentle and kind, and peaceful, always advising those who would listen to him, to forgive their enemies, and to make peace, and have no strife. But everybody shunned him, and disliked him; they called him a voudoo, and said that he had the evil eye; he, good, kind-hearted Father Andrea, who would lay his life down for his fellow creatures. And so he did, at last, monsieur. One day, old grand père fell into the river, where it is deepest, very, very deep; and Father Andrea saw the accident, and sprang in after him, and dragged him safely to shore. He never recovered from the shock—poor Father Andrea, for he was very old; he never recovered, for a terrible cold settled upon his lungs, and he did not last long. I did everything I could for him, monsieur," a short, dry sob choking her voice, "but it was little that I could do. He passed away peacefully, and died holding my hand. 'You will go out into the world alone some day, my child,' those were the last words he ever spoke to me, 'and you will have a fearful battle to fight; the odds will be against you. It is always so, with a woman, a friendless woman—with a brain, and a heart of fire. May the good God protect you, and keep you pure.' And when he said that, monsieur, he closed his eyes, and that was all." I had never seen death before, and it frightened me. I went home, and up to my room, and prayed to St. Mary Magdalene, (I always pray to her especially,

for she is my patron saint) I prayed hard for his soul, that it might not burn up in everlasting fire, as grand père says it will. And I longed to go through purgatory with him. I would have gone with him if I could, monsieur, for he was the only creature on earth who was always kind to me,—the only one."

The tears were rolling down her pale cheeks; and as Alaric Brandon gazed upon her, a tremor shook his heart. He began to be aware of the soundless depths of this child's nature, and to shrink back afraid. Was there ever any one like her before? Because this lonely world-weary old man—banished to the wilderness to end his days alone, in atonement for having resigned the priestly garb which he had felt that he could not assume honorably and purely,—because he had been kind to her, had spoken gentle words to her, and trained her to read and write, the boundless gratitude of the childish heart had gone forth in such passionate adoration that she "would have gone through purgatory with him, if she could."

God help her, this strange wild nature, when a woman's doom should come upon her, the bitter doom of love. Alaric Brandon laid his hand reverently upon the bowed head.

"So! he died—poor Father Andrea," he said, gently, "and—he is buried here, in the pine woods, I suppose?"

The dusky little head went up with a swift

gesture of disdain, and the dark eyes flashed with indignation.

"Yes, monsieur," catching her breath as though in pain, "he is--buried here, in the pine woods. Not in the graveyard, not in consecrated ground, as they call it, though why I do not know, for the graveyard is given over to weeds and thistles, and I should think no consecrated spot ought ever to be that. They said that Father Andrea (everybody called him Father, though he was not quite a priest) they said he was not good enough to be buried there among the dead who had died in the religion of Holy Mother church. But *I* think that he was too good to lie out there in that bleak and lonely spot, for the graveyard is the ugliest and barest place in the whole parish. So they laid him to rest in the very heart of the pine woods, beside a little creek; oh! just the very spot he loved, monsieur. *I* knew that, though I never told them, for fear they would not put him there, if they knew. His grave is at the foot of a tall pine tree; and in the spring the banks of the creek are pink with wild azalias, and *so* fragrant and sweet. There is a mocking bird's nest in the tree top; and the little birds all love to come there and sing over his grave. Monsieur, *I* think it far nicer than to lie in the dreary graveyard, just because it is consecrated ground. Some day—when I die—I wish to be laid beside him."

Alaric Brandon's dark eyes were misty with tears. "You will never forget him!" he said gently, "and no wonder! He taught you to be good and true." Her eyes kindled.

"He taught me everything that I know; he made me as good as I am," she cried passionately. "I am not very good, but such as I am—all the best of me—I owe to Father Andrea. Only, he would never talk to me about religion, or explain anything to me. When I told him how I prayed to the saints, and made them such offerings as I could afford, he would smile gently and sadly, and bid me pray to God. But, you know, monsieur, we are all good Catholics, and I do as I am told. If I do not—grand père beats me. Twice a year a priest comes here from the city, and we have mass in the old chapel a mile away; and he talks to me about following my religion, and praying to the saints. He *must* know," she continued, wistfully, "yet the last time he came, I got to *hate* him. For, when I spoke of dear old Father Andrea, he crossed himself quickly, and bade me hold my tongue.

"'Never speak again of that accursed heretic!' he said. Oh, monsieur, what *is* one to believe? One priest comes and tells us *this*; another follows, and condemns what the first one has said; and so, we get all tangled up, and lost in a sea of doubts. I am but a child, (I shall be sixteen St. John's Eve,) but I am sorely puzzled as to how I

shall get to Heaven. I want to go there, don't you, monsieur?"

His face flushed hotly, beneath the questioning gaze of the grave dark eyes.

"Yes, Mam'selle," he returned, gently, "I do. I think everybody does. But—'Heaven is not gained at a single bound.'"

"It takes so long, and it is so hard to find the way," sighed the girl, plaintively. "Monsieur, you will not go back to New Orleans to-morrow?" With a swift abrupt change of subject. He smiled.

"No, I think not. I am going to remain a few days. I am going to teach you something else besides Shakespeare, Mam'selle. I have no books with me, but I can repeat poems, and help you to learn new lessons. I will send to the city to-morrow for books, and you shall learn all that you wish, and we shall be firm friends."

"Something else besides Shakespeare!" Ah—Alaric Brandon, better perhaps had you been content to "let well enough alone." It was a cruel deed to stir this child's heart to its hidden depths, as the angel troubled the pool in days of old. Yet, he had no wrong intention. She was to him a fascinating study in human nature, and he was interested in following it up, to learn all that there was to be learned.

That night, when all within the little house lay sleeping, Mam'selle, upon her knees before the

Magdalene and the cross, was sending out her very soul in wild beseeching.

"Oh, good St. Mary!" the ignorant little heart was pleading, piteously; "help me to be good and wise; help me to learn, so that I shall be fit to be his friend; help me, I am so weak and so vile. I will bring you an offering of flowers to-morrow; I will dress the altar with fresh, sweet flowers, in your honor. Make me good enough to be his friend,—his little, humble, faithful friend! St. Mary Magdalene—pray for me! May all the saints intercede for me!" And as she arose from her knees some lines floated through her brain which Alaric Brandon had quoted in his play:—"I would rather far be trodden by his feet than lie in a great king's bosom."

CHAPTER V.

THE END OF THE DREAM.

Morning came, sodden and gray. The rain was over, but an east wind was hovering about, and the aspect was chilly and dreary. Alaric Brandon was up betimes, and for reasons of his own sought an interview with old grand père. He found him down by the river side, busily engaged in securing the skiff which the rise in the river—the result of the late rain—had partially dislodged from its fastenings. He glanced up at Brandon's approach with a gruff "*Bon jour!*"

The young stranger had found the way to grand père's heart, or whatever it was that did duty for a heart, in grand père's withered anatomy. He had found the key to the old man's inner nature; it was a golden key. So long as Alaric Brandon paid for his board and lodging, the two old people cared not how long he might choose to remain, or what the after results might be. *That* was no consequence—no concern of theirs.

Quite deferentially, the young man unfolded his plans to grand père's listening ears. He wished to keep the room he now occupied and remain under their roof as a boarder, removing en-

tirely from old Roger's domicile, and he would pay grand père handsomely; naming a sum which made the old man's ferret-like eyes twinkle with satisfaction. It was more money than he had ever possessed at one time in all his life before; it would more than repay him for the damage done his crops by the excessive rains; and which with judicious management might even yet be redeemed. "But," added Alaric Brandon in conclusion, "if I pay you all that money, it must be upon my own terms."

"*Que voulez vous?*" queried grand père, his face darkening like a thunder cloud. Brandon looked serious.

"You must not send Mam'selle back to the field while I am here!" he dictated his terms boldly, "and you must allow me to teach her. She has a wonderful mind, and with proper instruction will make a superior woman."

Grand père stamped his huge foot, encased in a wooden *sabot*, upon the ground, and an angry scowl made his face hideous. "*Diable!*" he cried wrathfully. "*She*, mak' all de trouble! She, de actor's brat!"

"*What?*" Alaric Brandon faced grand père with eager interest.

"What did you say, old man?" he demanded, "was Mam'selle's father an actor? By Jove! if this be true, that accounts for her wonderful genius! Only it could have been no ordinary

Thespian or stage-struck amateur whose blood runs in her veins. Tell me!"

He laid his hand upon the old man's trembling arm as he spoke. "I *will* know! Who were this girl's parents?"

A cunning light crept into old grand père's little red eyes. He smiled an inane smile, which disclosed two rows of toothless gums.

"I—know not," he returned, sullenly, after a pause, during which the young man studied every feature of the ugly old face before him, "I know nothing—nothing, I swear it;—nothing 'tall, monsieur! Why?"

"*Why?*" mimicking him audaciously—"why, indeed? You have a child in your house whom you have reared from infancy, and do not know who she is, what is her name, or whence she came. Bah! You cannot deceive me, old man. Now, tell me, who is this girl, and who were her parents? And mind! I want the truth! I will make it worth your while to confess."

For a brief space, the old man stood trembling under the weight of this temptation. His miserly, avaricious old soul longed intensely to accept the bribe. He might have revealed whatever it was that he knew concerning the girl's parentage, but at that juncture grand mère appeared upon the scene. With angry looks, she pounced upon the old man, and poured forth a voluble tirade in French; and although Brandon did not fully

understand the language, he could not fail to perceive that she was giving her liege lord a sound lecture. She turned abruptly to Brandon.

"He know nothing—nothing!" indicating her lord and master, with a swift movement of her wrinkled hand; "he spik and spik, but he not know! De gal is de chile o' *ma fille*, and I am her grand mère."

"With all due deference to a lady of uncertain age," retorted Alaric lightly, "I beg leave to doubt your statement."

But as all this was Greek to the old woman, she took no offense; and went on in a stream of broken English mingled with uncertain French—to explain. Mam'selle had been brought there by her poor mother, who was about to die of consumption, and left in care of her aged parents; fourteen years ago, when Mam'selle was not quite a year old, "she die, de *pouvre petite!*" whined grand mère, "she die here, and leave de little chile to pore ole grand mère."

"You will show me her grave some day," suggested Alaric.

The old woman's wrinkled face grew purple, then faded out to a dull opaque whiteness. She attempted no reply, but turning sharply about, limped slowly away, leaning heavily upon her cane. Alaric's eyes wore a look of amusement. He turned to the old man once more.

"Well, is it a bargain?" he cried. "Am I to

teach Mam'selle during the remainder of my stay? You cannot well afford to lose this chance to make money."

The old man smiled, it was a horrible parody upon a smile.

"Vair well!" he assented. "You stay! I no mak' no trouble. Mam'selle s'all learn; *bah! Oui certainement*, she s'all learn."

Having obtained his desire, Alaric was not long in communicating this good news to Mam'selle. She could hardly believe her own ears. She was not to go into the field again, while he remained; and she was to have all the books she could read, and Alaric Brandon for an instructor! Great tears overflowed the dusky eyes.

"Monsieur, how good you are!" she faltered. "Oh, there never was *any* one so good before except Father Andrea. I shall never forget you—never while I live."

And alas! poor Mam'selle kept that promise to the letter.

Seated upon this shady gallery under the drooping visteria vines, the self constituted teacher began his first lesson to his willing pupil.

First of all, he dispatched a messenger to the nearest post-office, to mail an order upon his newsdealer for a supply of books. But, with a brain stored with the choicest works of authors and poets, the self constituted teacher was not at a loss for a lesson. He felt quite Platonic as he

sat, like the old Grecian philosopher of whom it is said:

> 'People thought that he taught
> Children like a book;
> Seated under leafy boughs—
> That with the breezes shook."

And old Plato himself could have had no purer motive than the young man who was following his illustrious example. Alaric Brandon, *blasè* and tired of life in the great world, found this a new sensation. He opened to Mam'selle's eyes a glittering vista of delight, as he told her of the great poets, and quoted Tennyson, and Browning, and Bulwer, until great tears stood in the girl's eyes. Best of all she loved the sweet sad story of Elaine; and the little song that she made. A song of Love and Death.

> "Sweet is true love, though given in vain, in vain—
> And sweet is death who puts an end to pain;
> I know not which is sweeter—no, not I!"

Was it any wonder that, as the days drifted by —long, bright, breezy spring days, in which Mam'selle had nothing to do for the first time in her life, nothing to do but listen to the music of his voice, which thrilled her to the soul,—was it any wonder that the child grew to look upon Alaric Brandon as a demi-god? To her, he was the embodiment of everything grand and noble; the one man under the sun!

Spring grew into summer, and still the young man lingered at the old house by the riverside. Grand père had secretly taken to counting the bank notes hidden away in a dilapidated old stocking, and day by day the look of satisfaction deepened upon his wrinkled face.

Long, long ago, the books had arrived,—a whole box full, the sight of which made Mam'selle's eyes shine like stars. Then began her trance of delight. Even her beloved Shakespeare was forgotten as she poured over her books from morning till night; her very soul enraptured with the grand tales of poet and novelist. Alaric Brandon had selected only the *best*, and his taste was faultless and pure. History—romance, poem—all was devoured by the eager little searcher after knowledge. Mam'selle had never really *lived* before, she had only existed—vegetated; but now she was alive. Her soul expanded like a lily in the sunshine, and her heart was as pure as the lily. The days wore away—a long, bright dream of delight, and then—with a crash—the end came.

It was Mam'selle's birthday—St. John's eve—the twenty-fourth of June; Mam'selle would have good cause to remember that day. She had gone with Alaric Brandon down the river in the little boat, and landing at a pretty sylvan nook, they had seated themselves under a tree, to read. Mam'selle had brought a copy of Tennyson, and

the leaves fluttered open of their own accord at the familiar *Elaine*. Alaric read aloud, then and there,—from the poem; then glancing up suddenly—surprised a look in the girl's eyes which fairly startled him.

"Mam'selle!" he cried in alarm—"Why do you look at me so?" Her face grew crimson.

"I do not know, monsieur," she returned softly. "I—I was thinking how like Sir Launcelot you are."

He smiled; not ill-pleased with the subtle, but unconscious flattery.

"You imagine it!" he said, trying to speak lightly, but with a certain uneasy feeling stiring in his heart. She shook her head slowly.

"Monsieur!" she asked, abruptly, "what is love?"

He started as though an electric current had suddenly flashed through his body.

"My child! what a question!" he exclaimed. Her grave eyes, "charged with queries" sought his.

"Have you never loved?" she asked, innocently. His eyes dropped from before the compelling honesty of her gaze. He thought of the so-called loves of his past life—the passions in tatters—the playing at loving—the impulses which had stirred his nature, in common with most men of the world. He thought of it all, and a sickening disgust and horror of his own past, overwhelmed

his heart. He shook his head slowly. "No!" with sudden conviction, "I have never really loved in my life, Mam'selle; it is too late now."

"But, I do not understand," she persisted, "how one person loves another in the way all the poets tell us. It is wonderful. And when people love in that way—they marry, do they not? I have never seen your world, monsieur, I only ask you to tell me." His lips parted with a mirthless smile.

"Sometimes," he affirmed; "but it often happens that those who love the truest are parted forever; and marriage is ofttimes a delusion and a snare."

"Tell me why," she urged. "I know only what I have read in these books. Is not true marriage a union of souls, a mating of two who love each other, so that there is nothing in the world that they would not do, or suffer for each other?" He sighed.

"That is marriage—in Utopia," he made answer, his voice full of bitterness; "but the nineteenth century has witnessed a revolution. *Nous avons changè tout cêla!* You are French, Mam'selle, and know that that means—'we have changed all that.'"

"How strange!" she sighed, profoundly. "Yet the poets tell us that true love can never change—or die."

"True," he returned, "but then, you see, my

dear Mam'selle, as a rule there is so little real love connected with the average modern marriage. Do not trouble your wise young head over that question, my child. It is one that the gravest philosopher shrinks from analyzing,—like the mysteries of life and death."

Her face grew very grave. "Death!" she repeated, slowly, "I know something of that, for I saw Father Andrea when he fell asleep, and they called it death. It is nothing, monsieur, when a man like Father Andrea dies. It is merely a going away. I should like to die—I think."

Her noble face was all aglow with enthusiasm. She looked like one inspired, as she—in the very dawning of her young life, sat beside that woodland stream, and gravely decided that she would "like to die." Alaric Brandon started, and caught her hand in his, with a swift nervous gesture.

"Don't—dear!" he cried, "it hurts me to hear you speak like that. There are many long years before you, Mam'selle, years in which you will become great and famous. Look forward to that, my child; never look back. It is dangerous."

"I have nothing to look back to, monsieur," she said, simply. "And—but what is that?" starting up and gazing down the stream with eager eyes. "A vessel is coming up the river from the lake—from the city. It is a steamboat, monsieur; they sometimes come up this way with

picnic parties. Look! They are heading for this point. Sone one is waving a handkerchief. They must be friends of yours, monsieur!"

He had started to his feet, with a surprised exclamation, dropping the little hand that he held as though it had been poison, his face quite pale, and stern. Coming straight toward the shore a tiny steam tug was making its noisy way. Upon the deck two handsomely dressed women and several men. A blank expression settled down upon Alaric Brandon's face. "Yes," in a tone of dejection, "they are friends of mine, come to look me up, I suppose. By Jove! that reminds me that I've not written home for a fortnight, and that's what brings them here. What a confounded bore!"

Five minutes later the landing was made, and Alaric Brandon was returning the effusive greetings of two ladies. One—a statuesque haughty looking lady of perhaps thirty-five years, the other, a stylish blonde—a Dresden china sort of beauty, —a real fashion plate. "Dear me, Alaric!" letting her tiny gloved hand rest in his for a needlessly long time, "I had begun to think you had deserted me. So, we planned a little excursion and the river being at a high stage, found we could make the trip from New Orleans to this desolate region, and decided to surprise you. So! *this* is your hard work, and literary drudgery of which you have written?"

Her cold blue eyes sweeping the form of Mam'selle from head to foot—with undisguised contempt. "I was right when I fancied that you needed looking after, *mon cher!*"

"But—Althea——"

"I know you," archly shaking her golden head, in its dainty white plumed hat, "you are up to your old tricks, flirting as usual. Oh, it is quite awful to be engaged to a man who looks upon flirtation as a necessary ingredient in his life! Come, introduce me to your little friend yonder, one of the Aborigines I see. I shall be charmed to make her acquaintance!"

CHAPTER VI.

SEBASTIAN ORME.

SILENCE for a moment, an awkward silence, broken at last in sheer desperation, by Alaric Brandon.

"Mam'selle!" turning, with his accustomed grace and courtesy to the young girl standing pale and indignant at his side, "this lady wishes to be presented to you."

"I think not, monsieur!" she said, coldly, "if I heard aright, she was speaking of one of the Aborigines. I have no more claim to the title than she has to that of—*lady*."

"*Bravo*!" cried Gerald Danton *sotto voce*. But the half whisper did not escape Althea Marsden's ears. Her face became pale, and the large blue eyes grew dark as night as she flashed an angry glance upon Mam'selle. Poor Mam'selle! who had not meant to be rude or vindictive, but who could no more restrain her righteous indignation than she could exist without respiration. Hurt, stung—wounded to the heart, it was her natural instinct to retaliate. She had been struck, what else could she do, but strike back again? She was only a little barbarian, and had never learned the *finesse* of the world's people.

"Impertinence!" cried Althea angrily, for once

in her lifetime, quite unable to preserve her sweet smiling exterior. "Really, Alaric, I wonder at your forbearance, and the way in which you permit your betrothed wife to be insulted by—a—nobody."

But Gerald Danton, who was a merry laughter-loving fellow, always the life of the company in which he elected to cast his fortunes *pro tem*, intervened at this distressing juncture, with some jesting remark, and Mam'selle escaped further indignity.

All this time, the rest of the party—after the first greetings were over—had remained in the background. There were only Mrs. Winter—the cold, proud, haughty looking lady who had first come ashore, and Sebastian Orme. Alaric turned to the lady with a hope of changing the subject to less dangerous themes.

"Well, Valerie—Mrs. Winter," he began, trying to speak lightly—"since you have precipitated yourselves upon us in the shape of a picnic party, let us hope that you have not forgotten the materials with which to—"

"Refresh the inner man?" interrupted Mrs. Winter, languidly. "I should think not indeed. Althea evidently expected to find you in the last stage of starvation, judging by the baskets of good things which she sent on board our primitive steamer. Sebastian—Mr. Orme, will you kindly order the refreshments brought on shore."

A man who was standing, a silent and amused spectator of the scene which had just taken place, stepped from under the shadow of a huge live oak, where he was occupied industriously fanning himself with his straw hat, and going to the vessel, gave the desired orders; after which he walked straight over to Mam'selle's side.

"And did it really offend you to be called one of the Aborigines, little girl?" he asked, in a low, musical voice, but with a curious undertone of eagerness now in its indolent inflection. Mam'selle lifted her eyes, and for the first time saw Sebastian Orme.

Sebastian Orme, who was destined to enact so terrible a part in the tragedy of her young life. She saw a man no longer youthful; a man whose dark hair was streaked with silver, and with jetty eyebrows and moustache; a man with keen dark eyes, deep and fathomless, and a face as clear cut as a marble carving; every feature perfect. But, the mouth, with its thin red lips, had cruel curves; and the square chin revealed firmness and determination which were remarkable. A crafty face, a cruel face, a wicked face. There was something even now in the dark eyes fixed upon her, which made the pure soul of the child shrink away afraid. Mam'selle drew back a little. For the first time she realized how common and ill-fitting was her gown, how coarse her boots, and how tanned the bare brown hands, which until Alaric Brandon

had come, had been acquainted with sordid toil.

"I know that I am poor," she returned, in a low voice, which yet had a ring of pride in it; "I know that I am awkward and unaccustomed to people who belong to the great world; but I am *not* a savage—no matter what *she* says."

With a slight movement of her uncovered head in the direction of Miss Marsden, chatting gaily now with Brandon, and evidently doing her best to win a smile from the grave lips of the young man.

"Tell me," added Mam'selle, swiftly, plucking up sufficient courage with a desperate effort, "what is *she* to him—to monsieur?" An amused smile touched Sebastian Orme's thin lips.

"What? Oh—she has a mortgage upon him, that is all! In other words, my dear little innocent, Miss Althea Marsden is going to marry our friend Brandon. *That* is all settled."

Mam'selle started, and a slight shiver ran over her slender frame. "*Marry* him?" she repeated in blank amaze, "why, I thought that to marry, one must love; and he told me—he—told me not an hour ago that he loves no one."

Again, that smile crept over Sebastian Orme's lips; a smile full of mocking sarcasm.

"We have fallen upon Arcady!" he sneered. "My child are you really so guileless as to believe everything a man tells you. If so, I pity you."

"Why," the large dark eyes flashing, "can one

believe in nobody?" Orme shrugged his shoulders.

"Scarcely. And the little we *do* credit, we must take *cum grano salis*, that is, with a grain of salt. The sooner you learn this very necessary lesson in life, the better it will be for you, the more comfortable you will find yourself. Take my advice and trust nobody, Mam'selle; by the way—Mam'selle—*what?*"

"I do not know!" she replied, sullenly.

"You do not know?" repeating her words with blank amazement, "why, that is—nonsense."

"All the same, it is true," she persisted doggedly, her eyes upon the river rippling along at their feet, "I have no other name,—*if* I have, I know nothing of it. I am nobody—nobody at all! But, it cannot concern you one way or the other, monsieur. Besides, you have just bidden me trust no one." He laughed lightly.

"You are an apt pupil, Mam'selle Nobody!" he cried mockingly. Under his breath he was saying, while his eager eyes studied every changing feature of the mobile face, every lithe curve of the childish form. "Powers above! what a woman she will make some day! When she has fully matured, and that pale little face drops its childish expression, and the great dark eyes with their haunting look of sadness, have gazed upon a little more of the world, she will be worth a man's winning!"

The expression upon Sebastian Orme's thin handsome face, was cruel and rapacious. It was not unlike the look in the eyes of the sleek striped tiger, that contemplates his victim from the depths of the jungle where he lies hidden, making ready for the fatal spring. Woe to the woman that crossed Sebastian Orme's path, and whom he considered "worth a man's winning." A Sybarite, with the most luxurious tastes, and with great wealth, which gratified every whim or passing fancy, Sebastian Orme was a *conniseur* in certain refined vices,—if one may be allowed to use so ambiguous a term. He was cold and cruel, conscienceless and soulless; he had neither love nor respect for a living woman. They were to him like cobwebs in his path, to be swept carelessly aside, when they obstructed the way. He looked upon all women as legitimate prey. He forgot his mother, he forgot his sisters,—he felt only the desire to destroy. This girl, this wild, fearless, forest creature, was a revelation. The dark cruel eyes rested upon her now, with a look of admiration, and he said to himself:

"She is like some beautiful wild wood creature. It would be interesting to tame her, and put the fetters on. I can imagine her in a loose flowing silken robe, fastened with golden chains."

Only—the wild free thing chained, or shut up in a gilded cage would pine away and die; but of this, Sebastian Orme never thought; he never

troubled himself. She was only a woman—made for man's pastime, and of small value in his eyes. He looked upon her as upon a perfect picture or a lovely statue,—to delight the eye—the senses; then, be swept aside and forgotten.

There are so many women in the world!

"Ah, Mam'selle!" he resumed, in a light, mocking tone, "you have much to learn of the world's weary ways before you can be said to have finished your education. There!" turning swiftly in response to a summons from Mrs. Winter, "the refreshments are ready! Come—Mam'selle Nobody, —they are calling us."

She shook her head proudly. "They are calling *you*, monsieur, go," she returned. "I want nothing. And if I did, I would not partake of *her* food—no—not if I were starving."

"You little jealous, Mam'selle," he mocked, "you must learn to cover up all that, if you wish to live comfortably. Why, out in the world, Mam'selle, the more cordially a woman hates a sister woman, the more lavish is she with kisses and caresses, and the more she seeks her society, and makes believe to admire and love her. Oh! it is very pretty—and very edifying—the friendship one sees between women. Every kiss conceals a sting, every honeyed word hides poison, every smile has a scratch behind it. I assure you, Mam'selle, it is quite charming, only it makes one *tired*."

"I would never do that," panted the girl vehemently. "I would die first. Monsieur, I am honest." He smiled deprecatingly, showing all his glittering white teeth.

"*Don't*, my dear! Whatever you are or may be—do not set up the standard of honesty; you will only be laughed at for your pains, and nobody will believe you. By the way," with a searching glance into the downcast face, "I suppose our friend Brandon will be ready to accompany us back to New Orleans. We return to-night, and we have come for him, you know! He will go, of course!"

He stopped short, the words dying upon his lips at sight of the look upon the girl's face. It was ghastly white, and in the depths of the deep, dark eyes, there was something;—a look which made him think of the look which he had once seen in the eyes of a dying man,—shot down by his own hand, on the duelling field. That look was the one memory which Sebastian Orme had striven for years to kill,—to forget; but all in vain. It was a persistent memory, and refused to be banished.

"He will—go of course!" she repeated, blankly, in a faltering voice. "Do you think he will, monsieur? He will—go—of—course!"

The last words sounded hysterical. There was an undertone in the sweet, young voice which *almost* touched the sensibilities of her listener, who

thought no more of breaking a woman's heart than he did of the trip to Europe which he took every summer. The pain and pathos in the perfectly modulated voice had some effect upon the hardened man of the world, but only to show him her capacity for suffering. His eyes were upon her, drinking in all the possibilities, of her future.

"Mam'selle," in a low tone, "you are too beautiful to remain here in the pine woods. They will marry you off to one of those back woods lumbermen some day, and you will be tied down to a life of sordid toil and uncongenial surroundings that will kill you. It will break your heart Mam'selle. And there is a future before you, a grand glittering future out in the great world, if only you will have it! Mam'selle, remember what I say. When you are tired of all this, tired of living the life of an Arcadian shepherdess, tired of gazing upon the face of nature alone—come to the city; *I* will be your friend."

Something in the low tone, made the child's heart sink with vague apprehension; that subtle instinct which ofttimes warns a woman of the hidden snares that await her feet in the onward path. The girl's face froze down to a marble coldness and pallor. She lifted her eyes to his, and saw in them a greedy light, which made her shudder; yet she knew not why.

"I thank you, monsieur, for your—your kindness," the sweet, young voice was low and firm,

"but you want nothing of me! I am a nobody—a backwoods heathen, 'one of the Aborigines.' Good-day, monsieur!"

And ere he could recover from his surprise, she had turned aside and was making her way straight down the narrow path which led to the water's edge, where her own little boat lay moored. In one hand she carried the copy of Tennyson, which she had not forgotten, which she would never for get, since it had been the gift of Alaric Brandon. As she passed the group of merry makers, unobserved by them, she chanced to witness a tender scene. Alaric had just assisted Miss Marsden over a fallen log, and as he landed her safely upon *terra firma*, he lifted one tiny gloved hand to his lips. A fiery flame seemed to scorch through Mam'selle's heart at the sight, a fierce consuming fire. She trembled so that she could not stand; her heart beat in great strangling throbs which seemed as though they would choke her. She sunk helplessly upon a mossy log, out of sight of the company, and sat there like a statue. She had no conception of the meaning of this strange wild tumult in her breast; this passionate desire to *slay* the lovely pink and white beauty; to blot out all the fairness from that baby face,—to hurt —to crush—to destroy! In her ignorance, Mam'selle never dreamed of the demon which had taken possession of her young heart. Miserable and unhappy, she crouched upon the log where she had

thrown herself down, too wretched to weep; for all the tears seemed gone from her eyes, scorched up by the fierce flames that devastated her heart.

As she disappeared down the path which led to the river, Sebastian Orme's eyes followed the slim childish figure, walking so erect and proud, and a cruel smile parted his thin red lips.

"Perfectly innocent, and proud as Lucifer!" he muttered, behind the silky black moustache that shaded his faultless mouth; "the Red Mouse is a stranger to her heart; it has never whispered in her ear. Perfectly pure and passionless; as flawless as an Easter lily. And yet"——

Pausing, while the white teeth gnawed ferociously at the silky moustache, "she will fall! There is only one fate for such as she! Ah—Mam'selle Nobody,—I imagine, my pretty innocent, that we have not heard the last of you—not yet."

CHAPTER VII.

"THE PROUDEST LADY ALIVE."

As the child sat there alone, tearless and still as a marble image, footsteps came swiftly down the narrow path, strewn with pine needles, and the rustle of woman's skirts, swishing the grass with a musical *frou-frou*, broke the dead silence of the spot. But, Mam'selle neither heard nor heeded; she was dead to all external influences.

The footsteps halted; there was a pause, then, a gloved hand parted the overhanging vines of wild honeysuckle which trailed themselves over the spot where Mam'selle sat; and around the trunk of the tree which sheltered her, a face peered curiously. The face of Valerie Winter.

"Little girl," in her cold, slow voice, with its intonation of pride and *hauteur*, "why did you not come to lunch! Mr. Orme says you refused to join us. You make us appear inhospitable, and we would never be *that!* Why will you not come?"

Mam'selle lifted her heavy eyes to the beautiful, pale face above her, and her own flashed with wounded pride.

"*Why* madame!" she repeated, slowly—"be-

cause I have pride as well as you; as well as—as that haughty lady back there with *him*. Do you think that any one with pride and self-respect would knowingly intrude where they were not wanted—only tolerated?"

Valerie Winter stood irresolute, her high-bred face wearing a look of surprise. Pride? Ah, she knew all about it! Out in the world, her world of fashion and society, Valerie Winter was known by the *soubriquet* of "the proudest lady alive." The name had been conferred upon her by some ardent admirer, and had held its own, with Mrs. Winter. She was proud,—with the pride of high birth, immense wealth, and enviable social position, a beautiful woman, only "too faultily faultless—icily null." At the age of eighteen she had been wedded to a millionaire—many years her senior; an ugly old ogre, who made her life a series of scenes from the Inferno. Althea Marsden was her sister, nine years younger.

When Valerie had married old Stephen Winter, it was with the proviso that her sister should make her home beneath the roof of the Winters' in the event of their mother's death; their father had died years before. This arrangement had been made by their mother, who knew that her own time on earth was short, and as she had planned and plotted, and schemed to bring about this marriage, by which she had coolly and selfishly wrecked the life of the eldest daughter, she

meant that the younger one should profit by it. So Althea Marsden, who was exactly like her mother—in coldness and selfishness—had lived with her sister, in the splendid mansion, which had never been brightened by a little child's presence, she had lived there since her mother's death, a decade before. Althea Marsden had but one idol—self. To her there was but one thing in life worth living for—money, and all the pleasures it brings in its train. She was an animated fashion plate, a doll—a soulless image, and at the age of twenty-four, was a cold self-possessed woman of the world, a schemer, with a deep, crafty brain, and no conscience in particular to trouble her.

It amused Mrs. Winter to hear all this talk about *pride*, from the lips of this little, backwood savage. In sudden curiosity she bent her head, to gaze into the girl's face; that face was ashen white, and the deep, dark eyes were full of suffering.

For a moment Valerie Winter stared, looking the girl in the eyes. Her own face grew pallid, her blue grey eyes dilated to midnight blackness; the small gloved hands clasped convulsively together, were pressed hard upon her heart. She trembled as she stood there, and over her features a strange *frightened* look crept slowly and settled down in sharp lines of suffering and terror.

"In Heaven's name," her voice rang out, harsh and unnatural, "who are you? I have not had a

good look at you before, and now—now—" she caught her breath with a gasp, choking back a dry, tearless sob. "May God have mercy!" she moaned under her breath.

Mam'selle had arisen to her feet, and stood before this dainty lady, the leader of fashion, the wife of a great millionaire, and a feeling of *pity* stirred the child's heart.

"What is wrong, madame?" she ventured, timidly. "Are you ill? Let me go, and call—call—some one."

Valerie Winter drew herself up with a haughty gesture, and the olden pride flashed black into the blue, grey eyes once more.

"You shall not," she returned, haughtily, "it is nothing. I am better now. I sometimes have these sharp pains in my—in—my—heart; wait, girl. I asked you a question; answer me! Who are you?" Mam'selle's face had not lost its look of surprise.

"Who am I? Everybody seems interested in that," she returned, a little bitterly, "which is rather strange, since I am a nobody. Why, even monsieur Brandon—when he first met me, said, 'where have I seen a face like yours before?'"

Mrs. Winter started, and one hand resting upon the trunk of the tree, grasped the rough bark fiercely.

"He did! Did Alaric Brandon say that? Then—oh Heaven!"—She was wringing her hands

wildly—a desperate gleam in her eyes. "I asked your name," she added, falteringly, "because you look very much like some one I once knew."

"My name? I have none—save Mam'selle. I live with my grandparents, two old French people named Granjean. I have never known any other home."

And all the time that she was speaking, Mam'selle fancied that she could hear the sound of Alaric Brandon's voice. The thought that he was near made her wild with the longing to get away. She wanted to fly from the spot—so far away that he would never find her again. Yes, surely he was near, for now the tones of his voice floated to her ears as he addressed his companion.

"She came this way—I am sure of it, Althea. Now, why did she run off like this? The walk is too much for you, Althea! You will be exhausted; and there! You have torn your dress upon a brier, please return. Sebastian and Gerald are——"

Here Mam'selle lost the sound of his voice. But a moment later, the dry twigs snapped beneath his footfall, and Alaric Brandon appeared before her, alone.

"What in the world is the matter with everybody?" he began in eager haste. "Why,—*Valerie!*" He came to an abrupt halt, and his face grew quite pale as his eyes fell upon the graceful figure seated upon the log, her head resting

heavily against the tree. "Mrs. Winter has fainted!" he said, abruptly. "Mam'selle, what has happened? Why did you run away like that? Tell me."

Mam'selle's eyes did not meet his. "Let me get some water," she returned, evasively, "there is a cup in the boat."

She hastened to the river side, found the cup, and filling it with water, returned to Alaric Brandon. He bathed the cold white brow of the insensible woman; then he took a flask of brandy from his pocket, and forced a few drops between the close shut teeth.

"Valerie!" he called, softly—"what is the matter? Come, arouse yourself, can you not?"

The blue, grey eyes flared open with a wild expression in their depths; the white teeth sunk into the red under lip until the blood started. "Where is she?" she faltered—"why, Mr. Brandon! are *you* here?" Starting up with a suppressed cry; then, falling heavily back again, her head against the tree trunk.

"You are ill!" he said, compassionately. "Let me take you back to the steamboat. Come; lean on me. Althea will be frightened to see you looking so pale," he added. She obeyed him like a child, in submissive silence; and Alaric, led her away, leaning upon his arm, dropping a word to Mam'selle as they passed.

"Wait here for me, a little time," he said, in a

low voice, "I shall be back directly, and will take you home in your boat."

Half an hour later he returned. He found Mam'selle seated in the boat; and he sprung inside, and picking up the oars, pushed the boat from shore. She submitted to his guidance;—perhaps Mam'selle was beginning to be like other women—and found it pleasant to be waited upon.

"Well, Mam'selle," as the boat glided slowly down stream, "our idyl is ended, our happy time will soon be over. My friends have brought me letters from the city—letters of importance—and I must return home to-night."

Silence. No sound save the *swish* of the oars in the water, and the slight sound which the little boat made as it cut its way through. Not a word did she speak. She sat there quite erect, in the stern of the boat, as stoical as one of the Red Men to whose despised race Miss Marsden had accused her of belonging. Not a word escaped her lips. Alaric Brandon, who had fully prepared himself for a passionate outburst of tears and beseeching, began to feel vaguely uncomfortable and uneasy. At last, he could bear the silence no longer.

"Shall you miss me, Mam'selle?" he asked, softly. And then for the first time since his announcement he saw her face. She turned and looked full into his eyes. A swift light leaped into her own.

"You said that you loved no one," she said, in

a cold, hard voice, "and yet you love *her*, that pretty lady back yonder. You are going to make her your wife they tell me, yet, you said that you have never loved any one. I had learned to look up to you, and *believe* your word; I would rather have died than to know that you would be guilty of a *lie!* If I cannot believe in *you*, I can believe in no one. Monsieur, I feel that I am all alone."

He laid his hand upon hers, resting upon the gunwale of the boat. "I have told you the truth, all the same, Mam'selle!" he said, gently. "You do not understand these things, my child. And, —I want you to remember that—no matter what happens—I am your friend,—your only friend,— who will never fail you. When you need help and counsel, Mam'selle, come to me."

CHAPTER VIII.

AD FINEM.

No sound broke the silence, save the ripple of the water, as the boat glided lightly down the stream. Mam'selle's head was bent, and Alaric could not see the look in the beautiful melancholy eyes. He laid down the oars at length and let the boat drift onward.

"Mam'selle," he said, gently, "I do not wish to go away,—but then—you knew that this could not go on forever. You surely knew that I have to go away sometime." She lifted her weary eyes to his grave, handsome face.

"I knew—yes, monsieur. But then I would never stop to think about it. When the thought came to me that you must go back to the great world some day, and—leave me, leave me alone forever," a sob choking the sweet low voice, "I would always put it away from my thoughts. I would say—oh, *that* will not be for some time yet; days—maybe weeks Monsieur, think what it must be to have all the happiness of your life summed up and crowded into a few short weeks; and—I may live for years yet, live to be old and hideous like grand mère."

He laid his hand upon hers, and lifting the small brown fingers, pressed them to his lips. It was the first caress he had ever given her. She started as though he had struck her a blow, and snatched her hand away from his clasp.

"Monsieur! You did that to that cruel woman back yonder," she panted, in a voice hoarse with passion, "don't *dare* to kiss my hand—after—after that."

He tried to smile, but the smile died a sudden death upon his lips. "Now, you are childish, Mam'selle!" he said, gently, "why, of course I kissed Miss Marsden's hand, for she is, you know it now, my betrothed wife."

"And—you love no one? You have *said* so."

He did not answer. Almost, he had it in his heart to tell her all, all the various reasons of self-interest and worldly consideration, which had arranged his future for him. Althea Marsden had no money of her own, but it was understood by everybody that old Stephen Winter had made ample provision for her future in his will; that had also been a proviso, when the marriage had been arranged between himself and Valerie. So much for the forethought of a wise and prudent mother, who—in one stroke—had secured fortunes for both her children, through Stephen Winter's insane love for the eldest. What, though she had broken the heart of one! The other had no heart to break.

How Alaric Brandon had first drifted into this engagement it was hard to say. And now—now, as a man of honor,—a man with ultra ideas of honor, and the firmest principles,—he could not retract if he would; and why should he wish to do so? His prospects were fair. Not without means of his own, he was rapidly rising in his profession of writer.

With a fortune at his command, to what might Alaric Brandon not aspire? Ambition dominated him. Yet, he believed Althea Marsden to be a good true woman, or he would never have bound himself by that sacred promise. That she was wordly, he knew of course; he could not shut his eyes to that very palpable fact, but he believed in her love for himself, even though his affection for her was very slight. And what mattered it if there was little love in the question? It was only the way of the world. To sell one's self for gold, is such an everyday affair, that one thinks nothing of it. But—somehow—in the face of this ignorant child before him—this little barbarian who knew nothing of the ways of the world, he read such undisguised contempt now, that he grew ashamed. A certain sense of smallness—of unworthiness began to creep into his heart. And she looked so tragical, with the tears crushed back from the slumbrous dark eyes, yet very near the surface.

"Mam'selle, you do not understand," he reiter-

ated, breaking the silence between them. "Some day, should you ever go out into the world, you may then know the reason—the excuse for—"

"There is neither reason nor excuse for dishonesty, monsieur," she interrupted, coldly. "If you love her—Miss—Marsden,—you are doing right to take this step. If you do not,—you are committing a *sin*, to make her your wife. I know nothing of your world, no; and if it is all like this, all deceit and wrong doing, I do not care to, —but I judge from my own ideas of right and wrong. No deception ever prospers, dishonesty will never bring happiness; what matter if all the rest of the world be dishonest, it does not excuse you."

This was laying the law down with a vengeance. Alaric Brandon felt his face grow crimson, then pale; his eyes drooped from before the girl's stern inquisition.

"Mam'selle! Since you will not hear reason, the world's reason, I can do nothing—say nothing, only this. I have not spoken falsely to you—ever. I could not. Your eyes have a way of looking into a man's soul and reading what is written there. Only—believe me, dear; I am not false and deceitful,—though you seem to consider me so."

She said no more. Her head was bent, and as the boat drifted slowly on down the river, the great tears gathered in her eyes and rolled one

by one, down her cheeks. And at last, the *woman* triumphed over the stern inquisitor. She flashed swiftly about, and caught his hand in hers.

"Forgive me, monsieur!" she faltered. "I was too quick. I—I feel so sad, and—you are going away."

And now the tears fell, no longer restrained. The sight of them smote the man's heart like a blow. Anything but tears! Men in general, are the greatest moral cowards in existence, and there is nothing that the average man will not do or suffer—to escape a scene.

"Mam'selle," he said, in real alarm, "*don't*, Mam'selle! You pain me! Wait a moment, I may have no other opportunity, and I wish to leave you my address in case you get into trouble and need a friend. Here," he drew one of his cards from his card case and placed it in her hand. Upon its surface was his name, and the street and number, where his lodgings were situated, down in the great and busy city, a hundred miles away.

"I will keep it always," she said, "and am I *never* to see you again, monsieur?" He smiled.

"Oh, yes indeed, I hope so," he added. "And should the day ever come when you decide to go to the city, to study for the stage, I will do my best for you, Mam'selle, to find an instructor and —and all the rest of it. The city is a fearful place for a woman all alone, and without a friend,

you will need friends—women friends. I have a mother; she loves me dearly; I will ask her to interest herself in you."

"Thank you, monsieur. But, oh I can think of nothing now, but that you are going away."

They had reached the landing by this time; it was nearly sunset. Alaric sprung on shore, and took Mam'selle hand. She was getting accustomed to his attention now, to be waited upon, and she found it very sweet. How she would miss his tender care, when he would be gone.

Back at the old house on the river bank, Brandon soon explained to grand père the necessity for his immediate departure. There was the chink of money when the interview was over. Alaric tossed his belongings into the one trunk that he had brought with him, and arrangements were made to convey it and him to the point where the steamboat had landed, and where his party impatiently awaited him. It was after sunset; the trip down the river and across the lake would occupy several hours; there was a new moon, and the surroundings were wildly romantic. Under ordinary circumstances, the poetic soul of Alaric Brandon would have been thrilled with delight at the prospect. But, somehow he did not feel happy tonight; and—he had yet to say good-bye to Mam'selle. He found her down by the creek, beside Father Andrea's grave, which long ago he had learned was her favorite haunt. She was kneel-

ing beside the low mound, her tears falling like rain. He stooped and for just a moment took her in his arms, and held the desolate little creature close to his heart.

"Good-bye, little friend," he whispered, softly —"you have made a better man of me. Good-bye Mam'selle. Remember—I am your friend—when you need me."

But she could not speak, she could not utter a word. Only—with a humble little gesture she slipped from his grasp, down upon her knees and laid her cheek against the delicately arched foot in its perfect fitting shoe, with a mute little caress. He started, and a crimson streak crept over his dark cheek.

"Don't—don't do *that*," he cried, in a shocked voice; and stooping, he lifted her up on her feet once more.

"Now, go home like a good girl, and try and do your duty. And never forget dear, that I am your friend, and will do anything in my power for you. I care not what the world may say I will defend you and help you." And he meant it, every word that he spoke. Out there in the pure air, face to face with nature, it was so easy to be good and true and grand. She sank upon her knees, and hid her face in the long grass upon the grave of her old friend. Alaric laid his hand caressingly upon the bowed head. The sun was gone now; time was flying—and—Althea awaited his coming.

"Good-bye, Mam'selle," he said, softly—"God bless you." And then he was gone.

For a time the girl crouched there upon the grass; she had no feeling—no sense of suffering; all was a blank. Merciful numbness crept over her brain, and deadened the sharp agony. Yet she knew not what had gone wrong with her. She only knew and realized that in all her life of sixteen years she had known but *two* who cared for her, and—one lay under the grass at her feet, while the other was dead to her—far more surely dead than the one whose pure soul hovered near her even now. At last, she arose, weak and feeble, and made her way slowly through the twilight shadows back to the old house; a thousand times darker and drearier, and lonelier now, than ever before. A sharp pain gnawed at her heart—and she was faint and sick with desolation. How gloomy the old house looked! There was the accustomed seat on the gallery, the familiar corner where they had been wont to bring their books each day; she passed it with a swift shudder running over her. How horrible the loneliness and darkness inside! Yet there was the usual pine knot illumination which revealed the bent figures of the two old people, grand mère with her endless knitting; grand père with his pipe. Upon the table lay a book, a paper cutter between its leaves, just as Alaric had left it, the leaves half cut. Again, that shiver passed over

her—and her heart contracted with a sickening pang. On the mantel she saw a bunch of wild roses and pale green ferns; she knew who had left them there, and she covered her eyes with her hands for a moment. God help her! Not to see him—never to look upon his face again, and yet be haunted by the sight of these mute reminders of his presence, wherever she might turn. Slowly, painfully—half blind—she crept up the attic stairs, to the lonely silence of her chamber. Over to the crucifix in the corner, she groped her way blindly, and fell upon her face before the altar. She had no other refuge, she knew no other comfort.

"St. Mary Magdalene—intercede for me," moaned the pale lips, brokenly, "help me! I am lost! Oh, blessed Virgin—Mother of God—who didst suffer like other women, look down upon me and give me peace."

She had never before prayed to the Virgin Mother. She was too base and ignoble, too wicked and sinful; she had never *dared*. But now, she had broken the long silence and her heart sent up that wild beseeching cry to the Holy Mother, who was as other women in the kinship of suffering; even as Christ, the man of sorrows, was acquainted with our grief. The moments came and went, still Mam'selle crouched there upon the hard pine floor before the crucifix and the altar. Her soul was groping blindly in the dark-

ness, trying to find light. She was ignorant and superstitious; but she felt the need of a guiding hand, and was groping in the darkness to find it. In these prayers, these wild supplications to the saints, the girl had put her faith—her trust. Should they fail her; should she, (trained as she had been, to believe in a *literal* religion, a religion which would give her exactly the thing she prayed for) should she be disappointed now in the hoped-for answer to her prayers? It would undermine her belief, deprive her of her faith —her religion. An hour passed, and still Mam'-selle knelt there before the cross and the Magdalene. Another hour, and another; and morning creeping in at the open window, found her still prostrate before the altar, her arms clasped about the foot of the cross. * * * *

Out upon the moonlit waters of Lake Pontchartrain, the little steamboat made its noisy way back to the city. Upon its deck, well wrapped from contact with the chill night air, Althea Marsden sat at the side of her betrothed husband, his arm about her, her eyes gazing into his while she whispered softly: "You *do* love me, Alaric?" He bent his head before her, and she could not see the look in his eyes as his lips framed the answer—"*yes.*"

CHAPTER IX.

A HOLOCAUST.

THE first faint glimmer of dawn found old grand mére within the dreary chamber. She stooped over the prostrate figure upon the floor, and administered a sound shaking, "*Allons!* Git you up—you lazy thing!" was the affectionate morning greeting, "eet is day, and you weel fine dat your play time ees done. Git you up, and go you down to de *cuisine*, and mak' de fire; den —out to de fiel' you go—you—*snake*."

Sullen and obstinate, and utterly hopeless looked the girl's face with its swollen eyes, and the pathetic droop to the beautiful lips turned to bitterness as she staggered to her feet, from the hard floor where she had fallen asleep from exhaustion, worn out with her bitter grief.

Half an hour later, below stairs, she was going through the old monotonous round of sordid duties; like the blind god of old, chained to the wheel, the dreary endless grind for bread. Breakfast over, grand père shuffled to his feet, and standing like a huge, ugly image before Mam'selle, read her sentence:—

"So you fine frien' ees gone—eh? And with

him go de money—*l'argent*, and now none come een at all. Git you de hoe, and go you out to de fiel', dere ees corn to hoe; de potato weel be save eef de goot St. Swithin," in a whining voice, as though fearing that the listening saint might refuse to grant his desire, "de goot St. Swithin weel on'y keep back de rain, we weel save de crop. Out with you."

Slowly and mechanically, the girl took the heavy hoe, and slowly and falteringly made her way out to the broad field, where all day long under the fierce rays of an almost vertical sun, she toiled side by side with coarse laborers and negroes. She, with her heart of fire and brain teeming with poesy worked like a common bond slave. Time went by, and every day found Mam'selle in her place in the long ranks of "field hands;" for grand pére's funds were sufficient now to admit of having help enough to finish the work, and avert the threatened loss of the entire crop. Days—weeks dragged by. Mam'selle was growing thin and wan, and her eyes looked many sizes too large for the small pale face; but no murmur passed her lips; she was doggedly silent, and, every night before the cross, she prayed,—wrestling as St. Michael wrestled with the evil one, praying—praying—praying—the good St. Mary Magdalene to set her free, to open some way of escape—some way to liberty—and freedom from bondage; to let her eyes look once more

upon the face of Alaric Brandon! *This* was her secret desire, hidden away in the depths of her heart, which at last found its way to her lips.

"Let me see him just once more, good St. Mary," the ignorant little creature moaned from the depths of her bleeding heart; "I will ask no more—nothing; no greater boon than that. I have given you everything I have on earth—everything but the little string of beads, that grand mère says I wore upon my neck when my mother brought me here. My mother! She must have been very ignorant, or very hard hearted to leave me here with these people to drag out my life with such as they. I will give the gold beads too to St. Mary Magdalene; I will give her *everything!* I only ask in return, to look upon his face once more—and then—to die!"

From a tiny wooden box which stood upon a shelf in one corner of the room, Mam'selle took a string of gold beads—quaintly carven. Suspended from these glittering links was a tiny medallion. This, grand mère had assured her was a sacred medal which had been blessed by the priest, and if she wore it, she would be protected from all evil. But it was destined to go where poor Mam'selle's few worldly possessions had already gone (all save the beloved books, piled high upon the shelf, a goodly company) and now, the beads and medallion were lain upon the shrine, before the crouching figure of the Magdalene. The

ignorant heart of the child, groping in Tartarian darkness, felt relieved.

"Now! I have given everything, I have kept back nothing—but the books," she murmured. "I have given all else to the saint, surely she will not ask me to give those! If she does not prove to be my friend now, and help me—help—me, I will never pray to her again,—never—while I live! I want to see his face once more! It is six whole weeks since last I looked upon it. I want to see him just once more, then I shall be willing to die!"

The next evening at set of sun coming home from her labor in the field, with her weary body aching as if she had been scourged, and her shoulders lame from the weight of the heavy hoe that she carried, Mam'selle crept up-stairs like a wounded creature, to the stifling little room under the roof. What had happened? The room looked forlorn and desolate. The shelves which held her books were *empty;* all were gone. All the treasures of poetry and fiction that Alaric Brandon had given her, with her name traced upon the fly leaves by his own hand;—all gone;—and with them—the well beloved Shakespeare. An awful fear crept into the child's heart, and made her hold her breath for a moment; a horrible fear which slowly but surely grew into shape, and assumed gigantic proportions. Pressing her hand upon her heart, as though to silence its wild

throbbing, the girl turned, and slowly made her way down the narrow stairs, into the sitting-room. There were traces of recent fire upon the hearth, —fire, in that scorching July weather. The old man sat in a corner, his pipe in his mouth, a look of satisfaction upon his ugly face.

"Grand père!" She went straight up to him and faced him boldly, "have you taken my books? They are gone from the shelves up-stairs; gone—every one; where are they?"

Grand père took his pipe from his mouth, and his little red eyes glowed like sparks of fire: "Dere!" Pointing one grimy forefinger at the heap of feathery ashes upon the hearth—"You tink I goin' let a good fiel' hand like *you* wase you time een such a fool way?" he demanded, fiercely, "*non, non* Mam'selle! De books—dey burn, dey burn—dey gone now; *vôila tout!*" And he returned his pipe to his mouth, and went on smoking in placid content.

The girl stood like one rooted to the spot. It was not possible for her to speak; she had no words to utter. Her eyes dilated until they were black and deep with wordless suffering. Such anguish of mind as no one, even Alaric Brandon, who fancied that he had fathomed her capacity for suffering, could comprehend or realize.

In that cruel holocaust, she had simply *lost everything.*

"See, Mam'selle," grand père laid his pipe

upon the ugly wooden mantel, and faced that still, motionless figure. "You git big nuff now to be some help; you sixteen now, ole nuff to mak' a wife for some man. *I* needs a son—*un garçon* to work de crops. We save, we save, we mak' *l'argent*. Jacques Bourgois, *he* tell me to-day—'grand père—your *petite* Mam'selle—she suit me, I mak' her my wife.' What you say, Mam'selle?"

Her eyes were still fastened upon his face, as though looking straight through him, and she *laughed*, a low, mirthless laugh, that was not good to hear. A demon seemed tearing at her heart strings. Without a word she turned and went up the stairs, back to her own chamber; and her eyes had the look that is seen in the eyes of a mad dog, held in by the leash, yet raging to get free.

At the head of the stairs, she paused and intense silence fell, followed by a heavy crash. Muttering fierce execrations, grand père—followed by the old woman—hobbled up the stairs to see what had happened.

* * * * * *

Forty-eight hours later, Alaric Brandon in his comfortable sitting-room in a New Orleans flat—where he had bachelor apartments during his mother's temporary absence in Europe—was chatting pleasantly with Sebastian Orme. A servant appeared at the door of the room, his face wearing a look of perplexity.

If you please, Mr. Brandon, "he began, hesitatingly, "there is a person out here who wishes to see you immediately, a—a lady."

Alaric started, and the color flashed into his cheeks, as he caught the mocking gleam in Sebastian Orme's eyes.

"Shall I make myself scarce?" Orme queried lightly. Alaric looked as he felt—annoyed.

"Nonsense," he returned, "show the lady in, Simmons."

The man retired to obey the order. A moment later, upon the threshold framed in by the open doorway they saw a forlorn little figure. Wet, draggled, mud stained, with a look upon the pale young face which would have touched a heart of stone. Mam'selle stood before Alaric Brandon.

"You promised to be my friend, monsieur;" the low plaintive voice said mournfully, "and so I have come to you."

CHAPTER X.

THE YOUNG ICONOCLAST.

Not a word was spoken for a brief space, while Alaric Brandon stood staring blankly at his unexpected visitor. Slowly, from the corner where he sat unobserved by the girl, Sebastian Orme came forth from the shadows and approached her.

"Ah! I *said* that you would come," he cried, in a mocking voice;—"they all find their level like water, sooner or later; a sort of moral gravitation. So, Mam'selle Nobody, you are tired of pastoral existence, and have concluded to become civilized?"

She did not speak; she appeared not to hear a word that he spoke, she could only stand gazing helplessly into the face dearer to her then aught else on on earth, though she knew not why,—the face of Alaric Brandon. He spoke at last, and the troubled expression had not left his eyes. "Mam'selle! what has happened?" he asked, gently, "what brings you here? My poor child, something must have gone wrong with you, or you would never have come."

"Yes, monsieur;" the great eager eyes still devouring every lineament of the grave handsome

face before her, "something has gone wrong, very, very wrong. And so, as I could bear it no longer, I—I ran away. I walked all the long miles to the nearest station, and I worked my way to the city. I took care of a woman's baby—a woman who was coming to the city too, and she paid my way; and when we reached the city, she brought me here, to this house. You remember, it was upon the card you gave me when you went away. You *promised* to be my friend, monsieur, and I have no one else."

"So I did—so I am. Be seated, Mam'selle," wheeling a velvet arm chair forward, "you must be hungry. Orme, may I trouble you to ring for Simmons?"

A little later the door opened to admit that functionary, with an ill-concealed trace of surprise and well bred curiosity upon his perfectly trained features. But Simmons was a model servitor and knew better then to betray his curiosity at the unexpected apparition. Wine and biscuits were brought, and Mam'selle partook, although very sparingly. Excitement gave her strength. Her eyes glittered with a feverish light; she breathed rapidly like one in pain. The slight repast over, Alaric Brandon moved his chair nearer the girl and began:—

"Now, tell me all about it, Mam'selle. You need not mind Orme; he will not harm you."

"He cannot, monsieur," responded the girl,

coldly. "Well, then I will tell you. Grand père has burned all my books," choking back a sob, "all the books you gave me, and—and my Shakespeare—*all*, " she continued, passionately, "and he said that Jacques Bourgois, (a Frenchman who is horrible—simply horrible, monsieur) wishes to make me his wife. It was worse than death to think of such a thing even. I went up-stairs to my room, after he told me that, and grand père and grand mère followed me, and they said terrible things to me, monsieur,—cruel things. They said that I am base, and low born, and not fit to marry any respectable man, and I ought to be glad to think Jacques Bourgois was willing to take me; and then grand mère told me such cruel, cruel things about my mother, my own mother. Grand père said nothing upon the subject, but she—grand mère—oh, she made my heart beat with horror until it nearly strangled me to breathe. Monsieur—tell me—how *can* a woman be so hard and cruel to another woman, to one of her own sex? Why will they have no compassion upon each other?"

"Ah, Mam'selle," intervened Sebastian Orme, with his customary sneer, "you are fast being initiated into the ways of this wicked world. Take my advice, and never expect honest sympathy or real compassion from a sister woman, for you will be disappointed. They seek only to wound and pain each other. The woman has never yet lived who has proved a true and sincere friend to an-

other woman, unless for a purpose of her own—some object of self-interest. But go on with your story. What did grand mère say to you?"

"Yes," interposed Alaric, "what did she say to hurt you so?"

The girl's face grew whiter than before. Into her eyes a look of indignant wrath flashed swiftly. She arose to her feet and faced the two men, gazing upon her with intense interest.

"She said this, monsieur. Judge if you think me wrong to resent it. For a child must defend its own mother, when that mother is dead, and the dead cannot defend themselves. She said that my mother was bad, base and vile, and that I am like her. She said that my mother (I have always revered her memory, monsieur, Father Andrea taught me to do that) was a Magdalene. They always made me pray to St. Mary Magdalene, as my patron saint, but I never knew why, and I was determined to know. I demanded to know; and at last grand mère told me. She said that St. Mary Magdelene was a wicked woman, a woman without purity or goodness, and that she was possessed by seven devils, but Christ cast them out, and grand mère said that my mother—my—own—dear—dead—mother, was—*like that.* Monsieur, when I heard her speak those words, I think that I became possessed of seven times seven devils. I went mad, I believe. I knew then that all these months I have been praying to a saint, who is no

saint at all, but a wicked woman; and it broke my heart, monsieur; it—broke my heart. I said to grand père and grand mère—'I want no more of your religion, I will have none of it. It is all false—false and vile—as *you* are.' And, monsieur—my heart beat so hard that I could hardly breathe, and the blood surged so in my brain that I could hardly see; and for a time, monsieur, I think that I was mad, out of my mind. I said that if the saints had no care for me, I would give up all faith in them, I would live without them and have no more to do with them. So, I took the crucifix from the wall, monsieur, and I tore down the altar, and put it into the fire, where my books had burned. I saw that there is nothing in such religion, and I will have no more of it. The saints have never helped me; nobody has ever helped me—but Father Andrea—and you. The God in whom you believe has taken him; you alone are left; so I have come to you."

The sneer died upon Sebastian Orme's lip; Alaric Brandon bent his head before the girl.

"God help her!" he said, solemnly. "Without religion, without hope in God or man; only sixteen, and all faith killed within her childish heart. May God judge the guilty ones who are responsible for this; the parents who brought this child into the world, to cast out into darkness and misery."

"Monsieur," the sweet young voice interposed,

"you told me that when I was ready—to study for the stage—the real stage—to come, and you would help me; I am ready now."

"And I will help you, Mam'selle!"

"Thank you, monsieur."

Sebastian Orme's keen eyes had never once left off their scrutiny of the girl's pale troubled face.

"Brandon!" in an aside, "did it ever occur to you that this girl's face is oddly familiar, resembles greatly some one whom we have met? It has haunted me ever since I first saw her standing upon the river bank, in all her pride and outraged dignity, while Miss Marsden gave her those unkind cuts. Have you noticed it?"

Alaric Brandon nodded his head; then a troubled expression stole over his face.

"Good Heavens! what am I to do with her?" he asked, in a low tone. "My mother will not be home for a fortnight (I received a cablegram yesterday) and I know no one to whom I would wish to intrust her—this girl so easily wounded, and so quick to resent. There is absolutely no one but Mrs. Winter. Orme, do you think Valerie would receive Mam'selle until my mother's return? I shall *have to* take her there," he added, resolutely. "It is only nine o'clock, and I think I shall find them at home."

He rang the bell. Simmons appeared, with suspicious alacrity, which proved that he had not been very far away; and Alaric dispatched him

at once for a cab. Half an hour later, Valerie Winter, sitting with her sister alone in their luxurious drawing-room was surprised to hear the servant announce Alaric Brandon. And at his side, holding fast to his hand, as though she feared some evil, stood Mam'selle.

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE SAVAGE.

It was a striking *tableau*. Althea Marsden had arisen to her feet, as her eyes fell upon the unexpected apparition, their blue depths flashing with an angry light, her lips curling scornfully. She was too astounded to utter a word. Mrs. Winter, —pale and agitated, sat with her great grey eyes fixed upon the scene, with a look of something which was strangely like fear. One white hand was pressed against the lace bodice of her dress, the other grasped an arm of the chair in which she was sitting, with a nervous pressure. No one spoke a word.

Brandon broke the oppressive silence. "Good evening, ladies," he begun, his voice sounding strangely uncertain. "I beg your pardon for this intrusion; but really, it is a matter beyond my volition. This young lady," indicating Mam'selle, with a swift, comprehensive glance, "has arrived at an unfortunate time. My mother, as you know, has not yet returned, but as she will be home within two weeks, I venture to throw myself upon your clemency, and ask you to receive this young girl until my mother's arrival. Mam'selle has

come to the city to prepare herself for the stage."

Althea Marsden's eyes were fixed upon the girl's frightened face in a long, cold, hateful stare. They traveled slowly downward, taking in every detail of the rough costume, and came to a halt at length, to gaze with cold, sneering criticism upon the feet which were plainly visible beneath the short skirts. The coarse leather shoes, ill-fitting and splashed with mud, were several sizes too large for Mam'selle; and Miss Marsden did not know that the feet which they covered, were much smaller and daintier than her own.

That cold stare seemed in danger of being indefinitely prolonged; then her lips parted, and with an odd smile—a hateful smile—she turned to her betrothed. "How long since you turned knight-errant, Alaric?" she sneered; "or have you joined the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children? *That* is the latest society 'fad,' I believe. Really, you look too funny for anything standing there. Of course we are willing to oblige you in any reasonable matter, but why should you inflict this nuisance upon us? Why not send her to the House of the Good Shepherd?"

"Yes, *do*, monsieur!" interposed poor Mam'selle, in an eager whisper; "let me go there! The *name* sounds nice—and—"

"Hush! It is no place for a child like you;

you would not be received there; you do not know of what you speak, Mam'selle; you must trust to my guidance, will you?"

"Yes, monsieur—to be sure."

"Althea!" Alaric Brandon's dark eyes met the wrathful gaze of his lady love's blue ones, with an indignant flash in their slumbrous depths, "this child has been thrown upon my protection and I cannot—dare not—cast her off. It is only temporary; I ask your hospitality for her for fourteen short days. It may be even sooner that my mother will return, and the hour in which she comes home, I will take Mam'selle off your hands."

"Humph!"

Althea looked daggers; but Alaric turned to Mrs. Winter, ignoring further conference with his betrothed wife.

"Valerie," his voice had a wistful ring in it, "surely you will not refuse this act of christian charity? This girl,—why, Althea, I believe your sister is ill!"

He dropped Mam'selle's hand which still clung to his, and hastened to Mrs. Winter's side. Her face had grown ghastly pale, her eyes dark with suffering, she was breathing hard, as though in pain. Alaric laid his hand upon her arm.

"Valerie, dear Valerie, what is it?" he asked, in alarm. "Are you ill? What can I do for you? Shall I take Mam'selle away?"

"No—no!" The words were breathed rather than spoken, in a whisper. "She shall stay, of course! I am not quite well, Alaric, I acknowledge it; there is something wrong with my heart, Dr. Dale tells me, but nothing very serious I imagine. Do not mind Althea," she added, in a low tone, with a swift imploring glance into the young man's eyes, full of pain; "she does not mean to be disobliging. Let the girl stay, of course, poor child."

The last words escaped her lips involuntarily, in a low, half audible tone. Alaric heard them, and a strange feeling stirred within his breast.

"You are very good and kind," he said, gently, "and I thank you. The girl is utterly ignorant of the world, of civilization, remember. She was never in a drawing-room before. Yet, look at her! One would think that she had been accustomed to luxury all her life."

Valerie's eyes flashed over to the open door where the forlorn little figure stood, silent and proud, the pale face set and stern, the great dark eyes fixed upon her face, as though to her alone the girl turned instinctively for protection from further insult. A shudder ran over Valerie Winter's graceful, silk robed form. She started up, suppressing a cry, as the sound of the outer door of the house closing sharply, fell upon her ears.

"It is Stephen!" she exclaimed, in a half frightened tone, "he has come home. Alaric, you will

oblige me, and you also Althea, by not mentioning this girl's presence in the house, to my husband."

"Certainly," returned Alaric, "and now, Mam'selle," turning to the lonely little figure, "you will go with this kind lady—Mrs. Winter—and I will see you in the morning."

"*Will* you?" The wonderful dark eyes seeking his, the sweet plaintive voice full of eagerness; "oh, I shall be so glad."

"*Humph!*" sneered Althea, once more, "then I suppose your calls for the next two weeks at this house, will be intended for this backwoods heathen."

Alaric made no reply, and Mrs. Winter led Mam'selle from the room. She seemed in strange haste, judging by the hurried manner in which she piloted Mam'selle up the broad, carved staircase, with its soft velvet carpet, which gave back no sound, and muffled their footfalls as they went. They did not encounter the master of the house: and at the top of the stairs, Mrs. Winter came to a halt, and breathed freely.

"This way," she directed, turning to a second staircase; "I suppose you have never climbed so many stairs in all your life before, Mam'selle?"

"No, madame, for, save the stairs at grand père's, I have never climbed any. I—well, you know something of the life I have led; and—every thing here seems so strange. It is all new to me, as

though I had suddenly entered another world. The lights in this house dazzle my eyes, and make my head ache. Already, I miss the pure air, and the scent of the pines. It is not easy to breathe in all this light and perfume. I feel oppressed, and it hurts me *here*," her hand upon her heart, "it hurts and stifles me."

"Poor child."

There was something odd in the tone of Valerie Winter's sweet, caressing voice. She set her white teeth hard together, as though to keep back a cry of pain, and her gray eyes looked strangely misty. Only for a moment did she betray agitation, then with a mighty effort she recovered herself, and was once more a cold, unsmiling statue, "the proudest lady alive!"

At the head of the second staircase, she paused before a door, and opened it. A neat and pretty room which had lately been used to accommodate a delicate young seamstress, who had long kept starvation at bay, at the shining point of a needle, and had at last sewed herself into her grave. Mrs. Winter had taken pity on the poor girl, and had received her under her roof for the few remaining weeks of her life. She had died in this room into which Valerie Winter now led Mam'selle. Once within the room, having hastily lighted a night lamp, she turned to the girl. "Wait here a moment," she said, "I will return directly."

She left the room as she spoke, re-appearing inside of five minutes, with something soft and white hanging over her arm.

"Here, child," an odd quaver in the musical voice, "is a night robe and some necessary garments. There is a bath room next to this; shall I show you how to turn on the water? And in the morning I will send Francine, my maid, to you with a dress of my own. Even though it should not fit you, you at least cannot appear in that which you have on at present."

"You are very good, madame," the girl's voice shook like a wind harp. "May the saints reward you and—" She stopped short, as the words passed her lips. She had forgotten for the moment her own apostasy.

"Do *you* believe in the saints, madame?" she added, softly. "*I* used to, and so—I forgot just now. I do not believe in them any more, not a single one."

"You should believe in God," ventured Valerie, gently.

"No, madame, I do not. Why should I? He sends all the sorrow and suffering into the world, yet we are told that we must love Him. He took away from me my one friend, and they put him in the ground, and I was alone, until monsieur came. He will take *him* from me too some day, I suppose. I do not care for God, for He does not care for me. If He did, I would not be cast out upon the cold

world, without home or friends. I am only an ignorant girl, and the little I have seen of life, is life in the backwoods. But, I have come to the conclusion that either the God we are taught to worship, is a hard, harsh, cruel God, or else He is not all powerful, and able to prevent all this sin and suffering."

Valerie Winter's cold, proud face wore a shocked expression. "Hush!" she commanded, coldly. "You rave like an Atheist. But it is only your ignorance, I suppose, for what can a child like you, know of such things?"

"Very little, madame, it is true," returned the girl, gravely, "but I have thought and thought upon the subject until it has sunk into my very heart, and I cannot put it out. I am puzzled to know why a God of love allows such things to be; if He is able to prevent them; and if He cannot prevent such evils, then, how can He be so mighty and powerful? It troubles me all the time, madame. I *want* to be good! I would like to serve God, a God of love and kindness; but I know not if there be one. So, I have made up my mind to have nothing to do with religion, or any of those things for which I once cared. Everything seems dark and hopeless now. I do not know where to find a God,—and—I *hate* the saints."

"Stop!" Valerie's voice was harsh and discordant with horror. "You know not what you say!

An ignorant untrained girl like you—to dare arraign your Maker! It is horrible!"

She sunk into a seat, covering her face with both white hands, upon which diamonds glittered brightly. They were the price of her bondage; those gleaming baubles for which Valerie Winter had bartered her own soul. She uncovered her face and arose to her feet, at last, staggering like a drunkard.

"I must stay here no longer," she faltered, "I will go now. Listen to me, Mam'selle. I wish you to remain in your room—this room—to-morrow morning until I come to you. I do not wish you to come down-stairs; do you understand?"

"Yes, madame, I will obey you."

"Very well, Mam'selle," after a pause, during which her eyes studied the face of the girl with devouring eagerness, "have you no recollection of your father and mother?" Mam'selle shook her head.

"Not the slightest, madame. Whoever they were, I hate and despise them."

"Hush!"

"I do. How dared they bring me into the world, and then leave me—to Heaven only knows what fate? I can never forgive them."

"You must. You must try. You are far too young to have a heart full of hatred."

"But I will not tell a lie. I *do* hate and despise them! They were more cruel than the wild

beasts; for even lions and tigers will not desert their young."

"You are worse than a savage!" cried Valerie, angrily. "In the world into which you have so rashly intruded yourself, no one ever *hates*. If they do, they have the tact to conceal it, while you—ah, stop a moment, Mam'selle, there, just as you are; Good Heavens!"

She stood with one hand upon her heart, her wild eyes riveted upon Mam'selle's face, while low under her breath she whispered brokenly:—

"Powers above! how like—how very like! Just his voice, his eyes, that tragic gesture! Oh, Heaven—pitying Heaven!"

She flashed swiftly about, and moved toward the girl as though to take her in her arms. Then suddenly freezing into coldest *hauteur;* she turned and moved swiftly to the door.

"Good night," she said, coldly.

"Good night, madame," returned the girl. Mrs. Winter closed the door behind her, and went slowly down the stairs.

An hour later when all the household was wrapped in slumber, a white robed figure stood gazing out upon the stars, with eyes full of heart break.

"The sins of the past," Valerie Winter was moaning over and over, "the sins of the past. How they arise from their graves to confront us. Oh, Father in Heaven, be pitiful, for I am the

most miserable woman on earth. To be under the same roof with her, *his* child! It would be better for me if I were dead."

She looked as she was,—a woman whose life story has been told; a woman cursed with a haunting memory. "A memory of old dead days that would never, never, return for any call, any entreaty. A memory that was worse than death; for death comes but once, but memory always." And memory is immortal. While life lasts *it* lasts.

CHAPTER XII.

"SO LIKE HIM!"

For the first time within her recollection, Mam'selle opened her eyes to the morning light without the hateful face of grand mère bent over her own, the ugly blear eyes gazing into hers, while the hard hands administered a sound shaking, and the cracked voice aroused her from her slumbers with coarse epithets.

Long habit made the girl awake at an early hour; so early that no one in the aristocratic mansion was astir. She comprehended this, at length, and lay idly gazing about the room, into which the first grey of dawn stole timidly. For, ere she had retired for the night, this wild little creature of the forest, unable to breathe in a close atmosphere, had thrown open wide the blinds and windows of her room, and so had left them all the night. The thought or fear of burglars never once intruded itself upon her mind, for she had never heard of such midnight intruders. Fresh air and plenty of it, was absolutely necessary to this wild wood savage.

She lay quite still, her eyes roving about the pretty room, not at all costly in its furnishing, but

to her unaccustomed eyes, it was a room fit for a princess to occupy. She did not know the names of half the articles scattered about, or for what use they were intended, but the pretty things pleased her eye and interested her. The night lamp had burned itself out, and the room was misty with a faint, grey pallor, and all was sweet and still. The usual noises of the great city had not yet begun for the day; a feeling of quiet stole into the girl's heart as she lay still, her cheek pressed against the soft, lace trimmed pillow.

"It is the first moment that I have felt easy," she murmured, drowsily, "for everything is still, there is no noise. Oh! last night it was fearful! I could not hear myself speak; I could scarcely control my own thoughts. But now, morning has come, and"—with a sudden lighting up of the perfect face, which transfigured it—"I shall see *him* to-day."

She sat up in bed, and looked about her, with wide open, admiring eyes. "How pretty!" she exclaimed, aloud, "and if he has such lovely things, I wonder that he ever came to the pine woods, to stay at old Roger's or grand père's. They will miss me there, this morning," she went on musingly, her red lips parted with a dreamy smile; "I wonder what grand mère will do for some one to scold? How I should like to get up and dress me," she added, reflectively; "but madame said I must not leave the room—and—I

have nothing to wear! I just could not go among them all, in my old clothes until they are washed."

Sadly contemplating the coarse blue homespun gown, the common shoes, and hideous yarn stockings, which grand mère's wrinkled fingers produced, for the sake of economy.

"Madame wore such pretty slippers last night," the girl went on thoughtfully; "and I actually believe her stockings were *silk!* Oh! how rich, how *very* rich, she must be! Well no matter, the day may come when *I* shall wear pretty things too. When I shall have a silk dress, and a real gold chain, and shining slippers. And then, monsieur will look at me and say, 'why, child, how nice you look. Now, I shall write a play and you shall act it upon a real stage.'"

So, all her day dreams ended. No matter from what point she started, her thoughts and dreams would always converge into the same grand *finale*, the stage upon which she was destined to *act*. If ever there lived a born actress, this child was following out her destiny.

Lying back upon the pillows, her eyelids drooped drowsily, and Mam'selle was soon asleep. She slumbered for an hour or more; and at last, after a length of time which would have driven old grand mère wild with rage, Mam'selle's dark eyes opened to the world once more. Beside her bed stood a slender figure; a girl attired in a pretty pink dress, with a dainty white muslin

apron. Upon her frizzled blonde head, a tiny square of lace; upon her *piquante* face a look of amusement rested. She had come to this room in obedience to her mistress's order, to assist Mam'selle in performing her toilette; and the coarse clothing which lay upon a chair betrayed Mam'selle as a nobody.

"So, you are awake at last," she cried. "I thought people that live in the backwoods were early risers. Come, get up, the bath is ready for you, and madame has sent you something to wear. I am to burn those old duds."

Touching one of Mam'selle's shoes with the toe of her dainty boot, Mam'selle sprung to an erect position, her dark eyes flashing. "You will do no such thing," she cried, wrathfully, "those are my clothes, such as they are, and I have no right to wear any others. Who are you, and what are you doing in this room?"

"I am Francine, madame's waiting maid. Here are the things she sent you, and I have brought you a cup of coffee. I am willing to help you this morning because it is your first morning in the city. As for not wearing the clothes that madame was kind enough to send you, why—you will *have to*, if you expect to remain here two weeks, that's all! Madame says you are to go with Mr. Brandon to see a teacher—some one who is to fit you for the stage," with a half contemptuous smile, "and a pretty figure you would

cut, to be sure, on the street with a fine gentleman like Mr. Brandon, in those rags."

That settled the question. Mam'selle accepted the situation with no further demur.

"Very well. I will obey madame; no one else. Now, if you will go, I will dress myself."

"I had better stay and help you. You will never know how to put on these things."

"Go; I will find out how. I can dress myself, thank you. It is a shame for anyone who is well and strong to have a woman to dress her, as though she were a baby."

With a light laugh, Francine left the room, quite willing to relinquish the duties which she had with secret reluctance undertaken, simply because she dared not disobey her mistress. Left alone, Mam'selle began the task before her. Half an hour later, she stood confronting the mirror, gazing at her own reflection with dilated eyes full of surprised wonder. *Could* it really be Mam'selle, the little backwoods drudge and bond slave, the field hand who had toiled with the negroes in grand père's corn and potato fields, day after day, and at night crept home to the cheerless cabin, where blows and curses awaited her? With a native deftness, she had donned the unusual garments, and now, a radiant vision gazed back into her astonished eyes from the depths of the mirror. Over the soft white undergarments, softer and daintier than any that Mam'selle had ever worn

before, she had buttoned the long, clinging, princess dress of white muslin, trimmed with a profusion of yellow lace. Only a cast off gown of Valerie Winter's, but it transformed the little backwoods savage into a picture. Upon her feet were veritable silken hose. It seemed incredible to Mam'selle, but the sense of touch revealed their soft silky texture; a pair of Mrs. Winter's slippers —dainty bronze affairs—were donned with intense delight, though they were much too large for the tiny, patrician feet. Then she let down her wealth of dusky hair, and brushed and plaited it in a loose braid, which fell far below her waist. She was a dainty little creature indeed, as she stood gazing at her own reflection in the mirror.

"So many people have said that they have seen some one who looks like me—somewhere," she mused, thoughtfully, as she carefully studied her own features in the glass; "monsieur said so, and Mr. Orme, and—madame! Oh! I wonder—I *do* wonder who and what I am? Shall I ever know?"

Alas, and, alas, the inborn desire ever lives in the hearts of the daughters of Eve, to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge. And when the day shall come when Mam'selle shall learn that which she so earnestly desires, she will curse the hour in which that knowledge enters her heart, and wish that she had died ere ever she had known it.

A light rap at the door, and it opened to admit Mrs. Winter. At her side, a look of ineffable disdain upon her fair face, Miss Marsden. As Althea's eyes fell upon the girl, so wonderfully metamorphosed, she came to a sudden halt, and her white hand grasped her sister's arm with a force which made Valerie wince.

"Good Heavens, Val," she cried, in a voice full of consternation, "I know now whom that girl resembles; she is just the very image of Lawrence Dorne, the tragedian. Of course, it is only an accidental likeness, but it is really very extraordinary. *Valerie!*" her voice rising to a shrill cry of terror, "you are suffering again. I shall send for Dr. Dale this very day. I don't like these mysterious attacks of yours; they must mean something serious."

Mrs. Winter had sunk into a soft velvet chair, and leaned her head wearily against its cushions, her face pale, her lips quivering, and great drops of perspiration standing upon her forehead. She lifted her hand, to check her sister's outburst.

"Say nothing, do nothing, send for no physician," she faltered, "I do not—want—him; he does—me no—good. Go, and leave me alone with Mam'selle for a few moments. I will be down directly."

In wondering perplexity—yet accustomed to her sister's strange and captious moods, Althea left the room, and Valerie Winter was alone with

Mam'selle. This unknown waif from the backwoods, whom the fastidious Miss Marsden had pronounced to be "the very image of Lawrence Dorne, the great tragedian." An actor who had taken the whole United States by storm, a few years before. A grand actor,—a genius,—a man, who once seen, could never be forgotten. Mrs. Winter closed her eyes wearily, and not a word passed her lips.

> Ah!—"who can minister to a *mind* diseased?
> Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HER LORD AND MASTER.

EVERYTHING was quiet; no sound disturbed the silence, save an occasional echo from the street without, mingling with the ceaseless jingle of the car bells.

After a time, Valerie Winter arose, and went to where Mam'selle was standing, silent and thoughtful. Laying her hands upon the girl's shoulders, she gazed down into the sweet face with a steady gaze.

"Child!" she said, in a husky whisper, "have you ever heard the name of Dorne? Ever heard any one speak of Lawrence Dorne, the actor?"

Mam'selle shook her head, a bewildered expression creeping into her eyes.

"Never, madame," she answered, simply, "how could I hear of anyone or anything from the great outside world? I have lived all my life in the pine woods. You are laughing at me, madame. I know nobody, I know nothing." Valerie's lip curled slightly.

"You know enough of the teachings of certain agitators to make of yourself an Atheist," she said, coldly. "Where did you learn all those

theories in regard to religion? They are not orthodox; they are not right."

Mam'selle's eyes drooped, and a swift color flashed into her round cheek.

"I learned them from no one, madame," she returned gravely. "I thought them out by myself. There was a time when the worship of the saints satisfied me, when I had perfect faith in them, and their power to do good and evil. But now I know them better, I no not believe that they have any power at all, and I am done with them forever. Yet sometimes I feel that there must be some higher power to worship. And I wish, oh, so hard, to find a God! I feel that there is a better world than this, I feel it *here*," she said, clasping her hands upon her heart, with a pathetic little gesture, "but I do not know how to get there. You look at me in horror, when I say that I do not love or believe in God—the God you all pretend to worship; you look at me in indignation and horror, as though you think me some dreadful creature; but I am only honest and speak as I feel;—that is all. And I have had no religious teaching, you see, and know no better. Old Father Andrea never taught me any form of religion. 'Worship God; keep your life pure,' that was always his advice. But I worshipped the saints, for God was too far off, and I was afraid of Him; and there were the saints, right there in my own room; and grand père made me pray to them,

and make offerings to appease their anger, and try to buy their favor. But now I know the truth about them, and—

The words died upon her lips; for the door of the room had suddenly opened and a man paused upon the threshold. A man past middle age, with a coarse red face, iron grey hair and beard, and small shifty eyes peering out from under heavy brows. At sight of the intruder Valerie Winter uttered a low frightened cry, and fell back, grasping the marble slab of the dressing table with one cold hand, while her eyes—dark and dilated—were lifted to the cruel gaze of the man before her.

If ever a man carried the indications of his true character upon his face—betraying his inward nature, this man's hard features revealed his real character—harsh, cruel, brutal; a domestic tyrant. He had made Valerie Marsden his wife, knowing that her very soul revolted at thought of the marriage; that she shrunk from the touch of his hand, and could ill conceal her aversion. Somehow he had become possessed of the idea that she loved some one else, that there were pages in her past history, turned down from before his inquisitive eyes. From the moment that this belief entered his narrow mind, he set himself to watch her, and constituted himself a spy upon her actions. But not a flaw could he discover in the conduct of this woman whose cold, proud exterior had earned for her the title of "the proud-

est lady alive!" Yet he was always alert for possibilities, always watchful. He was not the sort of sentinel to sleep at his post. There was a gleam of triumph in his crafty eyes now as they met her frightened gaze, and her pale lips faltered forth his name:—

"Stephen!"

The thin, hard lips parted with a slow smile, a hateful smile which seemed to gloat over her misery; to cry aloud in evil triumph:—"I have found you out. You are concealing something, keeping a secret from me, but I have found you out."

And, you might as well look for mercy from the hungry tiger with his huge paws already upon his prey, as to hope for mercy,—pity—clemency from Stephen Winter. He stepped into the room with slow deliberation, and closed its door behind him. Still, that meaning smile rested upon his inscrutable features, that evil gleam shone in his keen, crafty eyes.

"Ah! my dear Mrs. Winter!" he began in a sneering voice:—"So! you receive guests into my house of whom I know nothing, and of whose coming I am not apprised. Be obliging enough to inform me who *is* this young lady. It is a new departure, rather an unusual case to find my house occupied by strangers, without so much as 'by your leave.' Pray, when did this young lady arrive, and how long does she intend to remain?"

"Not another moment, sir," put in Mam'selle, flashing indignantly about. "You are an ill-bred old man whoever you are, and your heart must be as hard as a rock. Why, even in the pine woods, where we are all savages, no one would be guilty of such an act of rudeness to a guest! We are only savages you know, and have not been educated up to your city standard. I thank you, madame, for all that you have done for me," laying her small brown hand timidly upon Mrs. Winter's arm, "but I will not stay here, where I am not welcome. Let me have my old clothes, and I will go at once."

"You must not, you cannot go, Mam'selle. It is out of the question."

Valerie's voice was firm, though low. "Mr. Brandon brought you here to remain until his mother's return; you *must* remain. Stephen," turning to her liege lord with a look of appeal in her eyes, "this girl has come from the country to prepare herself for—to learn how to make a living. She is a *protégé* of Mr. Brandon, and he has asked me to receive her for a few days until his mother's arrival. Let her stay, Stephen. I, who have never asked of you a favor, beg you to consent to this. I cannot—cannot—let her go away alone, go forth unprotected in a great city, a strange place. It would be horrible to do that."

"Humph! She is able to take care of herself," sneered Winter, coarsely. "But, since she is

Brandon's *protégé*, (are you quite *sure* that you are telling me the truth, Valerie?) she may remain. But, mark me, Mrs. Winter," he grasped her slender wrist with a vise like grip, and glared angrily into her white frightened face, "if I find that you have been deceiving me, or concealing anything from me, be it ever so small, I will make you sorry to the last day of your life. Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, Stephen."

"Do you understand me?" the pitiless tyrant went on. "I will have no concealments, no underhand work here, I promise you."

Valerie Winter's face was as pale as death, but in her eyes there was something which looked like defiance. The small head held itself proudly erect, and in her voice, clear and sweet, there was a tone which he had never heard in it before.

"There is nothing wrong," she returned coldly, "and the girl *must* stay. There is no help for it." His red face flushed still redder with swift wrath.

"Indeed? But, suppose *I* say that she shall not? What *then?*"

"Then—*I would leave too.*"

He started as though the jeweled hand had dealt him a blow. His small, restless eyes fairly scintillated, and his hands were clinched as though they longed to grasp her white throat. He was fairly trembling with rage. But with wonderful self-possession he controlled his anger, and said in

a milder tone, which was evidently intended to be conciliatory:—"Have your own way for this time, madame; but keep your backwoods savage (that is what she acknowledges herself to be) out of my sight, while she is here. And, remember," his cold eyes studying Valerie's proud still face resolutely, "if I find out that you have misstated in the smallest particular, it will be the greatest mistake of your whole life, and you shall suffer for it."

He turned upon his heel and left the room, slamming the door rudely behind him. Mam'selle drew a long breath.

"Good heavens! what a horrible old man!" she exclaimed, involuntarily; "is he your father, madame? Yet, even so, how dared he dictate to you and treat you as though you were his slave? He reminded me of grand père!" Mrs. Winter sighed.

"I am indeed his slave," she returned, sadly; "as much so as any that was ever sold in the market. But, it is a just punishment I suppose. I bartered my freedom for gold, and this life of misery is my reward."

She spoke in a slow, musing tone, forgetful of the girl's presence.

Mam'selle's eyes flashed with indignation. "But, what right has he, madame," she persisted. "How dared he doubt your word, and question your truth in that bold way? It made the blood boil

in my veins to see the way he looked at you. *I* would have ordered him out of the room. Pardon me, madame, but who is he?" Valerie's short upper lip curled disdainfully.

"He is—my husband;" she made answer scornfully. "I am his property, according to the laws of the land. I promised at God's altar—to 'love, honor, and obey' *that* man—Stephen Winter."

"How *can* you do it?" cried Mam'selle, vehemently, her cheeks flushing and paling with excitement; "how *can* you love a man with a face that shows the cruelty and wickedness of his nature? And how can you honor a man whom you do not respect? And as for obeying him, *I* would never obey any one for whom I had neither love, nor respect, nor honor. Oh! madame I thought—I believed that in marriage there was always love. If not, how can it be really marriage? *I* would die before I would marry a man for whom I felt nothing but dislike and terror."

Valerie sighed. Out of her proud face, all pride and *hauteur* had vanished for the time, and her eyes held a strange, far away look in their depths.

"Poor child!" she said, softly, "what a lesson you will have to learn before you are done. Do not think of it at all, Mam'selle; just put all such thoughts out of your head. Devote yourself to your art, and—*Mam'selle*," she sprung impetuously to the girl's side, and laid her hand caress-

ingly upon the bowed dusky head, "whatever you do in this world,—never *love*. Avoid it, shun it, fight it back from your heart. All the unhappiness, all the misery, all the anguish that a woman's heart can ever know, comes from *love*. I hope you will never care for any man, my child;" the sweet voice falling to a whisper. Mam'selle's eyes met hers, frank and fearless.

"I do not intend to," she made answer, with all the ignorant assurance of youth, knowing naught of *what* was before her—"oh, no, madame, I shall never do that," she went on confidently, "and after what I have seen of married life, I want none of it." Valerie smiled.

"Well, let us speak of something else," she said. "Now, come down to breakfast with me, there is no need of secrecy, since Mr. Winter has found out your presence here. And in an hour or so, Mr. Brandon will call, and then, you will know what plans he has formed for you." But, as she led the way down the stairs, Mam'selle following her closely, she added under her breath in perplexed anxiety:—"I wonder how Stephen ever found out that she is here? He must watch me as a cat watches a bird."

And she never dreamed that she was indebted to her sister for this. She never dreamed that Althea had sought old Stephen Winter, and betrayed Mam'selle's presence in the house, certain that the girl would be speedily ejected. But she

was doomed to disappointment. And when her glance fell upon Mam'selle seated at Valerie's side in the dainty breakfast-room, partaking of the morning meal, the look of wrath in Althea's pretty blue eyes, was something bad to see.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE FIRST STEP.

TEN o'clock had just struck, that morning from all the clocks throughout the Winter mansion,—dainty pieces of workmanship in ormolu, gilding, and bronze, when Alaric Brandon rang the bell and was ushered into the drawing-room. At one of the windows, her face partially averted, her eyes fixed upon the gorgeous flower-beds which dotted the lawn outside, the slim, graceful figure of a girl was standing. She was all in white, with a dainty, white lace hat trimmed with a simple wreath of pansies, upon her dusky head. She turned swiftly at sound of the closing door, and a small brown hand was outstretched in greeting. Alaric looked, as he felt—bewildered.

"I—beg your pardon," he was beginning; but just then she smiled, and the words died upon his lips. He fell back—and his face grew pale for an instant with surprise.

"*Mam'selle!*" he gasped.

"Ah, monsieur," a bright blush over-spreading her cheek, "you did not know me? No wonder! Am I not fine? Madame is so good to me; and she gave me all these pretty things. Of course,"

with sturdy independence, "I do not like to be under obligations, so I have arranged all that with her. She has promised to accept my services in payment. I am to be her maid while I am here; for Francine wishes to go away for a vacation."

She paused, quite out of breath, while Alaric Brandon could only stand and gaze upon the bright face with its ever changing expression; the lissome figure set off by the fleecy white dress with the delicate creamy lace which garnitured it. The piquant face with the wonderful dark eyes, deep and slumbrous, was uplifted to his own. Something in the expression of her eyes made a strange sensation steal over Alaric Brandon. A feeling of annoyance followed it. He felt angry and out of temper with himself.

"Do I look presentable, monsieur?" she queried, timidly. His eyes brightened.

"You look beaut—very nicely," he corrected himself. "Oh, Mam'selle, how long I wonder, before you are spoiled by the world, by flattery and adulation? For that is certain to be your fate, sooner or later, with your face, and your genius." She checked him with a slight, involuntary gesture.

"Genius? Have I really genius, monsieur?" she queried, eagerly. "Because, if so, I am content, and care nothing for the face. Yet, by the way—monsieur, did you ever hear of a man named Lawrence Dorne?"

Alaric Brandon started, he brought his two hands together with a swift gesture, and uttered an exclamation :

"I see!" he cried, excitedly. "I see it now! I have found the clue to the perplexing resemblance, which so many others have observed. Mam'selle, you are very like him! Your face is the counterpart of Lawrence Dorne's."

"I—monsieur—you are jesting."

"No, no, I see it all! I have been greatly puzzled by a shadowy resemblance to some one; I *know* now. You are the very image of Lawrence Dorne, the tragedian. Wait; there is an album of celebrities in the cabinet yonder; let me show you Lawrence Dorne."

He took from a handsome, carved cabinet, an album sumptuously bound in the finest green velvet and gold, and turned its pages swiftly over until he came to one face, the face of a man of some five-and-thirty years; a peerless face. Features regular and faultless; deep, dark eyes full of mesmeric power, dreamy with subtle magnetism. Alaric turned from an eager survey of the photograph to the face of the girl at his side.

"They are *fac similes!*" he cried, "how strange —how very strange!"

As he spoke, the door opened to admit Mrs. Winter, attired in street costume.

"What is so strange, Alaric?" she queried, smilingly; and in a few words he told her of the

unaccountable likeness between Mam'selle and the famous tragedian.

Again, that swift frightened expression flashed into Valerie's eyes; her face grew pale, and she leaned heavily against the carved side of the cabinet, while a shiver passed over her.

"These accidental likenesses are very singular," she returned, with an effort, "but they are met with frequently. Now, Alaric, if you are ready, I am at your service. Of course, I could not think of allowing Mam'selle to go out without a chaperon. Though she be the backwoods savage that Althea declares her, she must be trained at once in the ways of respectable society. Have you taken any steps in regard to her future, Alaric?" He nodded.

"Yes I have seen Prof. Bernard, whose business it is to train pupils for the stage. He is willing to undertake the training of Mam'selle, for a consideration. But, he makes exorbitant demands upon her time. After I had informed him of her secluded life, and had made plain to him how complete is her ignorance of the world, he said that it was essential for her to enter his institution (a school of art;—a sort of boarding school and convent combined, don't smile, Valerie,) and there simply *devote* herself to the profession she has undertaken. With it all, he educates. She will emerge from the institution with a first-class English education and fully prepared for the stage. It

is all very reasonable, but the term of exile is unconscionably long, five whole years! Shall you like that, Mam'selle?" turning to the girl as he spoke, with his swift sweet smile.

"Like it, monsieur? It is not for me to say. If that is the only way for me to perfect myself in the profession I have chosen, and if I am able to—to pay my way, why, it *must* be done. And, as for my like or dislike, it will not matter, since that is the only way."

"Bravely said," he cried, lightly. But, there was an odd, uncomfortable feeling in his heart, which he did not himself understand. The wise men of old bade mankind, "Know thyself!" But Alaric Brandon with all his imaginary wisdom—the wisdom of the world, had not yet learned the alphabet of that knowledge. He turned to Mrs. Winter with a sudden recollection of fleeting time.

"My engagement with Bernard is for eleven—sharp; had we not better be going?" he suggested. "I have a carriage at the door, Valerie. That will perhaps suit you better than to take your own!" She bowed.

"You are thoughtful, Alaric," she returned, "but I will not effect to misunderstand you. Stephen has learned of Mam'selle's presence in the house, and since she is your *protégé*, has consented to allow her to remain for two weeks."

"How extremely kind!" cried Alaric, sarcas-

tically; "then let us be off. Bernard does not fancy waiting; in fact, the old autocrat *will not* wait a moment. Come, Mam'selle."

The drive which followed was a long kaleidoscope of delight to Mam'selle, yet she evinced rare discretion, and because she realized her own ignorance of the sights and scenes around her, wisely held her tongue and refrained from comment.

But the drive came to an end, as everything must, sooner or later, though Mam'selle could have wished it indefinitely prolonged, and the trio were soon in the presence of the dramatic autocrat—Prof. Bernard. Alaric had already repeated to the old man, Mam'selle's story, her life in the pine woods, and the rare gift which she possessed. The old man had listened with polite attention; but within his mind there lurked a feeling of disdain for the presumption of this little backwoods embryo actress. But after a minute examination of her latent powers, he turned to Alaric with a beaming face, a look of satisfaction in his eyes:—

"My friend!" he said, eagerly, "you have not over-estimated the young lady's ability. It is something extraordinary; though crude, of course, since she is perfectly ignorant of stage art, I find in her more than talent. She has genius. Do not feel uneasy as to her future. As surely as she lives, her success is assured. A grand and glorious career awaits her, if only she will devote herself to study and preparation. How is it—

young lady?" turning to Mam'selle, with a bland smile, "are you willing to study hard—hard—remain hidden from the world, devote all your time to preparing yourself for the stage,—the profession you have chosen?" Mam'selle's face was full of suppressed excitement.

"I will do *any* thing," she cried, eagerly, "*any thing* in the world, to succeed."

"Very good. Then you will enter my establishment in ten days' time."

"So soon?" interposed Alaric Brandon; "why, she has not yet seen any thing of life in the city, or tasted the pleasures of the world. She must at least attend the theatre. There are several still open, for summer engagements."

"But," ventured Mam'selle, shyly, with a timid glance into Alaric's face, "all this education will cost money—a great deal of money. How am I to repay this gentleman for the hard labor of preparing me for the stage, my board, and necessary expenses? I am poor; I have not a dollar in the world; nothing of any value except these." As she spoke she drew from her bosom the string of gold beads with the quaint gold medallion attached. As her eyes fell upon the trinket, Valerie Winter started up with a low cry, but swiftly suppressed, and her hand was outstretched eagerly.

"Give it to me!" she said, in a husky voice; and without the slightest hesitation Mam'selle

laid the necklace in her hand. Composing herself with an effort, and forcing a smile to her face, Mrs. Winter turned to the professor. "Prof. Bernard," her voice was unsteady, "allow me to assume all responsibilities of this young girl's education. Name your price; it shall be paid. Only —with the understanding—the solemn promise from you—that my share in the matter shall not transpire—that no one—not even Mr. Winter shall know that I have assisted in this cause. I have my own private funds and—"

"And it is your desire to *surprise* Mr. Winter? I understand," interposed the professor blandly, as she came to a halt. Valerie bowed.

"Exactly. At all events I wish no one—no one save Mr. Brandon—to know that I have had anything to do with the matter," she added, a little coldly.

"Your wish shall be considered sacred," he returned. "No one shall ever know. It does not concern any one but ourselves, and I assure you Mrs. Winter, my business affairs are never made public."

"That is well. Now let us proceed to business. I will write you a check for the first year's instruction at once."

It was accordingly done, and the check placed in the professor's hand. During all the years of her married life, Valerie Winter had been secretly eaying aside certain sums of money which she

had saved from the really generous income settled upon her by her husband, and which had been paid into her own hands to do with as she pleased. In money matters Stephen Winter was generous toward his wife. As she left the professor's *sanctum* and returned to the carriage, Valerie was saying low under her breath:—"So, I have saved for some purpose after all! To—educate *his* child."

Her face was still pale, and she looked like one who has been through a cruel ordeal. Once at home, Mrs. Winter went straight to her own apartment and locked herself within. With a stealthy movement, as though afraid that she might be watched, she drew forth the string of gold beads, and with a dextrous pressure upon a concealed spring, opened the medallion. Mam'selle had never known that it was possible to open it. Within the lid—there was a curl of soft dark hair, nothing more. It was a tiny curl—soft and and silky—evidently cut from a man's head.

With a groan of anguish she fell upon her knees beside her bed, pressing the tress of hair to her lips, kissing it passionately, weeping over it in wild delirious joy, behaving like one suddenly gone mad.

She knelt there until a summons came from below. Visitors had come; and the poor social bond slave must return to her daily *routine*. A fashionable woman has no time for tears. With dewy eyes and tremulous mouth, she hid the lit-

tle curl of hair away in her private escritoire, and then, outwardly calm, and cold, and stately as ever, "the proudest lady alive" went down to the drawing-room to do penance. That night, when Alaric Brandon opened the album of celebrities in the pretty carved cabinet, intending to take another look at Lawrence Dorne's pictured face, the photograph was gone.

CHAPTER XV.

"I WOULD DIE FOR HER!"

THE next night there was to be a reception at the Winter mansion. Night came down upon the luxurious drawing-rooms ablaze with light and redolent of rare flowers, which were heaped in artistic profusion everywhere. A band of famous musicians had been engaged, and the preparations were most elaborate. Certain dignitaries were expected to be present. The Governor of the state, a famous orator, and possibly the bishop of the diocese would drop in during the evening, as it was his comfortable custom to mix socially with certain members of his flock. Within her dressing-room Valerie Winter was making her *toilette*, with Mam'selle essaying to play the part of assistant. To-morrow, Francine would begin her holiday, and to-night she would initiate Mam'selle into the mysteries of the dressing-room. The little pine woods savage could only stare in helpless admiration at the beautiful picture which Valerie Winter made. She had installed Mam'selle in Francine's place, just to satisfy the girl, who in her sturdy self-reliance and honest pride, would not willingly be dependent even for the

brief time that she would remain under Stephen Winter's roof. She thought of Stephen Winter with a feeling of angry resentment, scorn and detestation. He should not be able to say that she had lived upon his bounty, accepted his *charity*—even for fourteen days. She would do something in return, while under his roof upon sufferance. For this man, the young barbarian felt the utmost contempt. "Contempt, like acid, can eat away the love of noble hearts, and reveal the truth in its pitiful nakedness," says Haggard. And into this child's heart contempt for Stephen Winter had sunk deeply; shutting out all kindliness and respect. She felt no gratitude for the shelter which he had ungraciously granted her. The acid of contempt had eaten into her heart, and corroded it, until it overflowed with a feeling which was almost horror of this man.

As Mam'selle's eyes rested upon the graceful figure of Mrs. Winter in evening dress (the very first grand toilet that the girl had ever beheld in her life), a cry of rapturous delight burst from her lips. Valerie was gowned in pale yellow *crèpe*, with glowing rubies in her soft dark hair, and upon her round white arms, and snowy bosom. Her eyes shone with a brilliant light, but her face was weary and cold. She looked like a marble Galatea; but did the man exist who could call into that statue the supreme breath of life?

"Oh, madame!" The child clasped her hands

in wild delight. "I never thought, never did believe that any living creature could be so lovely!"

A faint blush tinged her cheek. "Nonsense, child!" Yet not ill-pleased with the sweet flattery, because it was sincere, and she knew it. "You have never before seen any one in full dress, that is why."

Silence for a moment. Mam'selle's big eyes were fastened upon the perfect costume; upon the square cut bodice and the white bosom so plainly accentuated under the filmy lace which covered but did not conceal. "Madame!" she began, hesitatingly, "pardon me,—but why do you call it *full dress.* I should not call it that. Is it not, rather——"

She broke off abruptly; but the big dark eyes were eloquent with a silence which told its own story. A burning crimson suffused Valerie's cheek; she turned away.

"Have I offended you, madame?" cried the girl, eagerly. "Oh! please pardon me. I am only a backwoods savage; I know no better than to speak out just as I think, to tell the truth—the plain blunt truth—always."

Valerie laid her hand impulsively upon the girl's shoulder.

"Heaven grant that you will never change," she cried. "God forbid that your white soul should ever be stained with the falsehood and deceit of

the world. Never apologize for speaking the truth, Mam'selle. Then you will be misunderstood by the world's people; yet it is better—*anything* is better—than to be as the rest of us are, a heartless, godless votary of fashion. Be brave, be firm; never be afraid to speak the truth."

"I never shall," the girl returned, quietly. "I *could not.* Father Andrea taught me that none but cowards are guilty of falsehood. I hate deceit and shams, don't *you*, madame?"

Mrs. Winter bowed her head; the innocent words had struck home to her heart with a bitter, bitter pang. Shams! Deceit! Falsehood! Falsehood! *She,* who had stood before God's altar, and perjured her own soul.

Deceit! *She*, whose daily existence was one tissue of fraud and petty deception, undertaken to cover up the sins and mistakes of the past.

Shams! *She,* whose life was a continual pretense of that which she was not. Upon whose cheek even now, there glowed a false rose tint to hide the marble pallor of her face, which would otherwise have called forth sneering comment from her lord and master. She glanced at her own reflection in the mirror, and a hard look froze down upon her face. "I am a living lie," she cried, recklessly. She sunk into a seat before the dressing table, and bowed her head upon the white arms folded upon the cool marble. Mam'-

selle held aloof; she felt that there was something here with which she must not meddle. The moments ticked away, still Valerie Winter sat with her face hidden upon the unresponsive marble. At length a rap at the door aroused her, and she started up, as with an electric shock.

"Dear Heaven!" she murmured, faintly. "I had almost forgotten! Rich as I am in this world's goods, I have not one single moment that I can call my own! Ah, Francine," as the waiting-maid appeared, "is it you? It is time for me to go down."

"C'est ça, madame!" answered Francine, with a courtesy. "Ah, please turn a little; something is wrong with the lace."

Her deft fingers moving about amid the fleecy lace that garnitured the dainty costume. "There! that is well! Madame looks like an angel to-night."

"Hush! You are speaking foolishly. Mam'selle," turning to the girl, "I may allow you to come down to the drawing-room for a little while. Mr. Brandon wishes to show you a glimpse of the gay world; and I like to please Mr. Brandon when I can. And by the way," opening a drawer in the dressing-table, "here are your beads. Take care of them; I imagine that they are quite valuable. Should I really send for you to come down, you may wear that black and gold grenadine of mine in the wardrobe. It is lucky that you and I are

so nearly the same height. I had the dress altered for you to-day while we were out; it did not take long, and will make you presentable."

"Oh, madame, you are *so* kind! I should dearly love to see the world; and—please, madame, wait one moment." Drawing her aside beyond reach of Francine's ears, "you have given me no chance before to thank you for your wonderful goodness to me. I do not deserve it at all. I mean the arrangements made with Prof. Benard. I—I—just have no words with which to thank you, only—I would lay my life down gladly—to serve you. And should the day ever come when I can repay you—even by the sacrifice of all I hold dear—I shall not forget, madame, I shall not forget."

The tears were rolling down the girl's cheeks; her head was bent; the graceful form trembled. As she stood there in her crushed white dress, her long dark hair falling in a tangled mass about her slim figure, the string of gold beads hanging loosely from one hand, a vague memory crossed Valerie Winter's mind.

A memory of Ophelia in the immortal play, before her tragic death. Almost she could hear the sweet mournful voice singing the piteous words:—

> "He is dead and gone, lady,
> He is dead and gone;
> At his head a green grass turf,
> At his feet, a stone."

And she recalled the scene with a swift, bitter pang, as she remembered *who* had acted the part of Hamlet.

She started, and a swift shudder ran over her. She put her hands to her eyes for a moment, as though to shut out the sight; then she turned to leave the room.

"You may dress yourself as I told you, Mam'-selle," she said, kindly. "It will do no harm to be ready, even though I should not send for you. Francine will help you dress."

"I thank you, madame."

And then, Mrs. Winter closed the door behind her, and went slowly down the broad, velvet-covered stairs, and was soon mingling with her guests, the same calm cold statue as ever "the proudest lady alive."

> "Warm tears the proudest eyes may wet;
> The lip that curls, may quiver yet!"

Left alone with Mam'selle in Mrs. Winter's dressing-room, Francine pounced upon the girl and insisted upon dressing her hair for the possible occasion.

"Your hair, it is so beautiful," she cried, "so long and thick and soft. I should say let it hang in a wavy mass all about your shoulders. You are young and slight, and it will not look too childish," she urged, as her deft fingers brushed out the heavy masses of hair, which she proceeded

to wave slightly by means of crimping irons. She drew the soft hair away from the broad low brow, and fastened it in the back with a golden arrow which she took from Mrs. Winter's dressing-table. There was something striking in the sweet, grave face framed in by that waving silky dark hair. Francine looked satisfied with her own work.

"I will make you look as pretty as I can," she volunteered, "and you *must* let me dress you for this once. For, really, you are a good little thing. Had you not agreed to take my place (though of course you cannot do much, but wait on madame) I could not have my holiday; and you know I leave to-morrow. I am going to my own home—on the *Têche;* and I have some one there who—who—loves me. Oh, I shall be so glad to see him once more."

As she spoke, she had opened a dainty dressing-case, and removed the silver stoppers from various bottles and boxes. "Come; sit down here," indicating a seat before the mirror, "while I make you up."

"Make me up? Now, Francine, what do you mean by that? *What?* Put that white stuff upon my face? I would look as if I were white-washed. Oh, no! no! Francine, I just could not. Anything but that. I will not. I will not!"

Putting both hands over her face as she spoke, Francine looked perplexed. "Dear! dear!" she ejaculated, "well, perhaps you are right. You

are a brunette anyway, and your skin is so clear! Well, at least let me put on a little *rouge*, only a tiny bit," holding up the hare's foot as she spoke. "Yes—yes, Mam'selle, you really *must*. A tint of this—a mere touch, will light up your skin and make you beautiful."

Mam'selle arose to her feet. "I am as God made me," she said, resolutely, "I will be nothing else. Francine, tell me; why is it that some people have so many unkind things to say about actresses using those things upon their faces? I heard Miss Marsden to-day upon that very subject. Why, the actresses are obliged to represent the parts that they play, and it is their profession; by it they earn their daily bread."

"Yet, these very same people who make so many hard remarks upon the subject, do the very same things themselves," interposed Francine, demurely. "Miss Marsden need say nothing, I am sure, for she powders herself—and paints too, and all the rest of it."

"It seems very strange to me," said Mam'selle, thoughtfully, "I do not understand it at all."

"Ah, my dear, there are many things that you do not understand," returned the waiting-maid, smiling. "I am afraid it is going to be hard work for you to make your way through the world. Life is difficult, Mam'selle, and we all have to learn to do as others do."

"I will never do anything mean or dishonest,"

cried the girl, bravely, "I never will! Oh, Francine, I love madame with all my heart. She is an angel. I would lay my life down for her sake; but even to serve *her*, I would not be guilty of falsehood. I would die first."

"Bah!" laughed the French girl, lightly; "you are too good for this world, Mam'selle, far too good." But the day came when she recalled her own words, remembered the conversation, and marveled at the prophetic truth which underlay it all.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE RED MOUSE.

A RAP at the door of Mrs. Winter's room with which the dressing-room communicated. Francine flew to open it. A tall footman in livery, with a note upon a small silver waiter. "For the young lady," he announced stiffly, in his secret heart rebelling with the snobbishness of most of his class, at being compelled to serve an unknown nobody like this girl, sprung from no one knew where, (no one in the servants' hall, at least,) and bound for—no one knew whither. Certain it was that this proud and haughty "Jeems," who had chanced to see poor Mam'selle when she had first arrived, and knew from her general appearance, that "she could not possibly be anybody," felt a righteous indignation that he should be demeaned by being sent with a message to *her*. Francine took the note from the waiter, and handed it to Mam'selle without a word. The waiting-maid was secretly amused at "Jeems'" discomfiture. With eager eyes Mam'selle glanced over the two or three lines which Valerie Winter's hand had hastily traced upon a visiting card, while the footman bowed himself out.

"Dress, and come down to the drawing-room, Mam'selle," the message ran. "Mr. Brandon wishes it, and I. If you come straight to the bay window you will find me waiting."

Mam'selle glanced up into Francine's face, her eyes sparkling.

"I am to go down," she cried. "Oh, Francine, I begin to feel afraid."

"Pooh! That's humbug! What's to harm you, I'd like to know," cried the waiting-maid. "And besides, if you have an idea of being an actress, you will have to get over that foolish timidity. Mam'selle looked grave.

"I shall have no fear when I appear upon the stage," she said, softly. "Why, I shall not think of the people at all. How could I? My whole heart will be full of the parts that I am taking. And I shall not *act*, Francine; I shall just *be* the character that I am portraying." Francine's eyes were round as saucers with amazement.

"You *are* a funny girl," she exclaimed. "*Drôle!*"

She was busying herself with the black and gold grenadine, and getting it in readiness for Mam'selle to don. The material was soft, fine, silky black, with golden threads gleaming through it, giving it a half oriental appearance. Francine speedily arrayed the slight form in the stylish costume. The neck was cut in V shape, not too low; Mam'selle fastened the gold beads about her

dusky throat glancing into the mirror with swift approval.

"I shall look like a mulatto beside the great ladies down stairs," she said, with a spice of mischief. "To be 'madeup' as you call it, Francine, it seems funny to me."

"So it does to most people," returned the maid, sententiously. "Now you are quite ready, Mam'selle. Fancy a girl going into a drawing-room full of fashionable people, without a corset, or a——"

"I could never imprison my body in a thing like that!" cried the girl, impetuously. "I must be free. I could not live otherwise."

She left the room with a swift, light step, every movement full of natural grace, and down the stairs went this wild forest queen into the presence of a cold, critical judgment hall. Alaric Brandon was waiting for her at the foot of the staircase. At sight of her in that dainty black and gold costume a look of intense admiration flashed into his deep, dark eyes.

"Is it really you, Mam'selle?" he asked, in a low tone. The hot blood crimsoned her cheeks.

"It is indeed, monsieur."

"Are you afraid?" he asked softly, as he drew her little hand through his arm. The hand was ungloved. Alas! poor Mam'selle had quite forgotten the pretty pearl-tinted gloves which Francine had assigned her.

"Afraid? Oh, no, why should I be? If I am

going to be an actress monsieur, I must be done with foolish timidity, so I am told."

"Quite right, I see that you never forget your chosen art, Mam'selle. Come this way; ah, child! who would have thought, who would have ever dreamed to see you in this brilliant assemblage, when we used to sit under the trees with our books, and you—loved no one but Shakespeare."

Her face had clouded; a misty look was in the glorious dark eyes. "If only dear old Father Andrea could see me," she said, simply; "he would be so pleased. For he feared for me, in such rude surroundings as I met at grand père's, and he would be glad to know that I am here, with *you*," she added, in a low tone. He started. Even here in this fashionable gathering, her first glimpse of the gay world, she did not forget. Her thoughts turned to her only friend of olden times; and *he* lay dead, under the wild roses and azaleas in the green and silent pine woods. Was there ever so constant a memory in the world before?

"Faithful little Heart!" he whispered. "Mam'selle, you never forget! You will never forget one you love."

"How *could* I?" she asked, simply, her eyes uplifted to his own. "It would be cruel, and then—besides, *I could not*."

Althea Marsden, radiant in heliotrope silk and white lace, had been watching for her betrothed

husband to appear; she had not seen him at all that night. Judge then, of her consternation when her eyes fell upon the spectacle of Alaric Brandon escorting Mam'selle into the drawing-room. She started and grew pale and wrathful. She came to her sister's side, and laid an exquisitely gloved hand upon her shoulder.

"Valerie," her voice quivering with rage, "tell me, do I see aright? Is it really my—Alaric Brandon—with that modern heathen—in your drawing-room? Please explain. I consider this an insult, and see, Valerie, *do* you see? *she has no gloves.*"

Which, being a breach of etiquette, was an unpardonable crime in Miss Marsden's eyes; a crime more heinous than "envy, hatred, and malice, and all uncharitableness."

"I shall leave the room! I shall go to my own apartment until that girl is sent to bed!" stormed the beauty.

"Don't do anything rash, Althea," said her sister quietly. "*I* sent for Mam'selle to come down for a while. She is going away in a few days to enter an institution where she will be prepared for the stage. When she leaves here, *we* will not be troubled with her for five whole years. Of course that is equivalent to *never.*"

There was a curious catch in Valerie's voice, almost like a sob. Althea glanced at her with curiosity. Valerie continued:—

"Let the little heathen, as you call her have a taste of pleasure while she can. She has never before seen anything but the woods, and she is sixteen years old. Alaric wishes to take her out some, to the theatre for instance, and let her see something of life in the world, for the few days before she goes to Prof. Bernard!"

"Prof. Bernard!" cried Althea, excitedly. "Val, what do you mean? Why—that would cost thousands! Who is to pay for it?"

Valerie's face flushed, under its pearl powder. She had spoken before she had thought.

"Money has been raised for the purpose," she returned, evasively, "it is all arranged, Althea."

"Who has furnished the money?" Althea's blue eyes held a steely light. They gazed back into her sister's face with calm determination. "Is it Alaric?"

"Nonsense! Now, you talk wildly. No! the money has been contributed by charitable people, lovers of the stage. It is all right, Althea."

But, there was a steady interrogation and an ill-concealed sneer in the look which Valerie Winter met in her sister's eyes, which made her vaguely uneasy. Although she did not know it, she had committed a grave mistake in the explanation which she had given Althea.

In the meantime, Mam'selle had been duly presented to the bishop, a benevolent faced, fine looking gentleman, as bishops are prone to be. By

Mam'selle, the honor was hardly appreciated, for she knew nothing of Holy Orders, and was profoundly ignorant, as to the extent of the condescension bestowed upon her. He seated himself at the girl's side, while Alaric, who had just caught sight of a pair of decidedly indignant blue eyes gazing upon him from a distant corner, went at once to Althea, and was soon going through a "duty dance" with his betrothed. Sheltered by the silk and lace curtains of the bay window where she sat, Mam'selle found herself practically alone with His Reverence.

"It is the first time I have ever seen so many people together," she observed. The bishop looked surprised.

"I am only a modern heathen," she added, impetuously, "at least that is what she—Miss Marsden, calls me." The bishop smiled.

"Oh! that is a mistake," he said, graciously. "And surely no one *could* be a heathen, in this enlightened land of ours."

And he did not know, he did not think. In his grand cathedral surrounded by wealthy worshippers what could *he* know, why should he think of the ignorance which runs riot in the slums and alleyways of great cities; and in the lonely pine woods, where the gospel is seldom preached, and when it is, it is so garbled by ignorance that it bears little resemblance to the truth. Yet, these very same pine woods lie within easy reach of the great city.

"I do not know," returned Mam'selle, doubtfully, her thoughts reverting to *grand père et grand mère* as she spoke. "I do not really know the full meaning of the word. It may be that I *am* a heathen, after all."

"But, you believe in God?" Her eyes met his with a swift interrogation, in which pathos was mingled with fear.

"I do not know Him," she answered, dubiously. "I have tried—oh, *so* hard—to believe, and to find out all about Him. But He is so far away, so very far away, and so grand and—and—everything, I am *afraid*."

"But," in a tone of horror, "you surely love God?"

"Oh! no—no. I just could not. And what would be the use, monsieur?—He has so much else to think of. He is so great, He would never trouble himself about me. I am a nobody—less than nobody, monsieur. I am like the dust that blows about, and settles in forgotten corners, so grand père tells me."

"You have a grandfather, then? And what is he thinking of, that he has let you grow up in such lamentable ignorance and darkness?"

The bishop's tone was severe; his face cold and grave.

"Grand père?" she answered, contemptuously, "why, he himself is as bad as a man can be. Yet, he thinks he is safe because he does penance, and

worships the saints. I used to, too, but now, I know better, and I never think of such things any more."

The bishop stared aghast. Here was a revelation; here was material for the Salvation Army, for the clergy and—yes, the bishops. Right here in the old Crescent City—in the midst of ultra refinement and education, in the midst of schools of Theology, and with bibles and prayer-books in plenty; here, where one meets a clergyman at every corner, and stumbles over a fat priest on every crossing; this great southern city, where innumerable spires and steeples point heavenward, *here* was a girl of at least sixteen years, utterly ignorant of religious teaching; who looked upon God with almost horror, and feared Him because He was so far away, and so grand. Into the lonely little heart no love of God had ever entered. Woe to Mam'selle if human love came first—now. It would prove to be a mad idolatry—which would stop at nothing, and would leave devastation in its wake. Without religion, without faith in God or man (save one) what a future was in store for this waif and stray. When a woman with a nature like Mam'selle's, *loves*, she gives all; pours out her very heart and soul, a costly libation, before the idol; lavishes it, wastes it. Yet, is true love ever wasted? Does it not rather "return to enrich the giver?" Only for the prodigal giver remains all "the cost and the pain" of the gift.

"My child," the bishop's voice trembled with emotion. He was a good, true man, and this glimpse into the girl's bare, empty soul and heart appalled him. "I will see you to-morrow. Mrs. Winter has spoken of you to me, and informs me that you are to remain in her charge for the present."

"Yes, monsieur; I am about to be prepared for the stage."

"*What?*" The bishop's voice was cold, and cut like a knife.

"The *stage?* Impossible, my child!"

"Monsieur, it is quite possible. I have to make my living; and God—the God whom you worship, monsieur, has given me a talent,—that of acting. I fear your God, though I do not love Him; yet I obey His commands (old Father Andrea, my best friend, who is dead, told me of it), to make use of the talents that He gives us."

The Bishop's noble face was clouded. "It is monstrous," he cried, indignantly, "to hear such sentiments from the lips of a child like you. You do not love God! Oh, what a terrible thing to say, my child."

"I know it, monsieur, but I must speak the truth. I will not tell a lie. I would sooner suffer tortures than be guilty of a falsehood. If I *could* love God, I *would* indeed. Tell me how."

But the bishop's voice was dumb. How could he tell her how to love the great Creator who

had given her life, who had given her the talent of which she was so proud? More: He had given His only Son to die for this girl, as well as for the rest of mankind. The bishop's tongue was mute for a time. But, long custom overcame his silence—and he began at last to tell her of God's great love for His people, putting it before Mam'selle in a light in which she had never seen it. She listened gravely, breathlessly. When he had finished, she slid her little hand into his, with the innocent simplicity of a child.

"I thank you, monsieur," she said, softly. "You are very kind to tell me, to have such patience with an ignorant child like me. I think Miss Marsden was right, when she called me a heathen. But, was it Christlike for her to say it, monsieur? *She* is a Christian, you know, and she goes to church every Sunday, and reads in a big white and gold prayer book. I shall not forget your words to-night. I tell you truly, I would give my life to find God, to love Him, and feel toward Him as you say I should."

"Ah! how many of the world's people would be willing to give their lives to find God, and to learn to serve Him." Vaguely the bishop felt it.

"I will see you to-morrow, my child," he repeated. And then, Alaric Brandon appeared.

"Shall I take you to the conservatory, Mam'selle?" he asked. She arose without a word. Where would she not go with him? Alas! I

fear that the darkness of Hades would have no terrors for Mam'selle, if Alaric Brandon were at her side. But, of all the darkness about her, all her own danger, Mam'selle knew nothing. She only knew that she was happy—happy—happy; for was she not with *him?*

Althea Marsden watched the girl in her simple, unconcealed happiness, and her face grew dark, and a resolute look crept into her eyes.

"Five years," she muttered, "five whole years. Ah, well, when this savage returns to the world a civilized being, I shall have been Alaric Brandon's wife for four years and a half."

Later in the evening, Mam'selle found herself standing alone in the conservatory, some one having summoned Brandon away. She stood under a large palm tree, from which tangles of white and purple passion flowers were drooping in wild profusion. The young face with its starry eyes full of musing light, looked sweet and pure, amid the clustering blossoms; she looked like a picture as she stood there.

So thought Sebastian Orme, as he sauntered slowly down the cool perfumed aisle.

"Ah, Mam'selle Nobody," the sneer always in his voice, when he addressed her, the mocking light always in his eyes, "so you come here to—to—is it an appointment, Mam'selle? If so, don't you know that Miss Marsden is a jealous creature, and Alaric Brandon is her lawful property,

signed, sealed, and delivered? Better not transgress, Mam'selle. Really, upon my word 'Ric Brandon is a lucky dog, to have so many fair ones sighing for him. Take the advice of one qualified to advise you, and keep out of Miss Marsden's way, or," his deep set dark eyes transfixing her with a long steady stare, "you will be sorry." Her eyes met his, with an imperturbable gaze.

"I do not understand you," she said, coldly. "I have nothing to do with Miss Marsden; I wish nothing to do with her. I would as soon touch a snake."

"Humph! Mam'selle, see here," drawing a little nearer the girl, and attempting to take her hand in his own, "listen to me! You are young—very young—and beautiful, exceedingly. It is so! I am not flattering you. And you know nothing of the world, nothing at all. Yours is a sad position. I am full of sympathy for you. Do you know, I have taken a fancy to you, Mam'selle? I"——somehow his eyes could not meet hers; they wavered and fell, from before her calm steady gaze, "I have been thinking that you need some one to take care of you. Mam'selle, I should like to take you under my protection."

Still the calm, steady, unwavering eyes fixed upon his dark handsome face; still the little figure stood there under the drooping passion flowers, and she answered never a word. She did not understand him; she was too pure. A little

babe fresh from God's hands is not more stainless and innocent than was this wild untrained girl from the Louisiana pine woods. Over her white soul the red mouse had no power.

"What do you say, Mam'selle?" he persisted. "Will you come with me? I will take you to Europe. Should you like to travel? It would be pleasant to sail over blue seas, under sunny skies, would it not, Mam'selle?" She smiled.

"It would indeed if—if—monsieur—Mr. Brandon—came too."

Sebastian Orme ground a bitter imprecation out from between his close shut white teeth.

"You are acting a part and acting it well!" he cried, harshly. And as he spoke, he threw his arms about the slight form, and attempted to press his lips to hers. *Then*, vaguely—indistinctly—she understood, and her white soul revolted in horror and indignation, a feeling akin to despair. One hand went up into the air, and came down upon his cheek with a stinging blow; a blow which crimsoned the dark skin, and made his brain reel.

"You little devil!" he panted, wrathfully, starting swiftly back as he heard the sound of approaching footsteps, "I will never forgive you for this insult, never to my dying day, so help me Heaven; I will pay you back for it, with compound interest."

And Sebastian Orme was not the man to forget,

or to break such an oath registered against a helpless woman.

He slunk away as the footsteps drew nearer, and Alaric Brandon came in sight. Mam'selle's eyes fell upon him, and with a bitter cry she sprang forward, and he caught her in his arms. Her head fell upon his shoulder, where she wept and sobbed as though her heart would break. Yet, when he questioned her, she would not tell him why. She *could* not.

The lights are out, "the banquet hall deserted" at last, and Valerie Winter, in her secret misery and despair, "fronts her chamber's loneliness." Her liege lord has long since retired to his own apartment across the hall, and is sleeping soundly as a man may well sleep who has that night made intimate acquaintance with the contents of various slim, long-necked bottles in wire coverings. The music of a prolonged *snore* falls upon her ears, as she stands there, and her lip curls scornfully. Over her statuesque face a cold, hard look freezes down. Then a sudden wave of utter anguish and black despair sweeps over her soul; and she bows her head upon her clasped hands, and all is still.

"Ay, madam, here alone,
You may think till your heart is broken,
Of the love that is dead and done,
Of the days that with no token
Forever more are gone.

"Has the Past then so much power,
You dare not take from the shelf
That book with the dry flower,
Lest it make you hang yourself
For being yourself for an hour?

"Why can't you let thought be—
For even a little while?
There's naught in Memory
Can bring you back the smile
Those lips have lost. Just see—

"Here, what a costly gem
To-night in your hair you wore,
Pearls on a diamond stem,
When sweet things are no more,
Better not think of them.

"Are you saved by pangs that pained you?
Is there comfort in all it cost you?
Before the world had gained you,
Before that God had lost you
Or your soul had quite disdained you?

"For your soul (and this is the worst
To bear, as you well know)
Has been watching you from the first,
As sadly as God could do;
And yourself, yourself have cursed.

"Talk of the flames of hell!
We fuel ourselves, I conceive—
The fire, the Fiend lights. Well—
Believe or disbelieve—
We know more than we care to tell.

CHAPTER XVII.

A GLIMPSE OF THE WORLD.

THE bishop did not forget his appointment to call upon Mam'selle the following day; and in the course of the morning was ushered into Mrs. Winter's drawing-room.

He found Mam'selle awaiting him, fresh and dainty, in a snowy lawn dress, the quaint gold beads about her neck.

"I have been thinking," she began, in her grave, straightforward way, as soon as the greetings were over, of all that you told me last night. Monsieur, I *want* to be good, but I cannot understand your religion; I know not the way; and who is there in the world who follows its directions?"

"We are all sinners," returned the bishop, gravely.

"That is why I feel so discouraged," she cried, eagerly; if there is no one good on earth, how can *I* hope to be any better then the rest? It seems all uphill work, monsieur." The bishop sighed softly.

"You must pray to God for strength and guidance," he returned. "You *must* love God, my

child, and attend divine service, and try and follow its teachings."

So, after promising to appear at service in the grand Cathedral on the coming Sunday, Mam'selle found herself alone once more.

The bishop took his departure with a rather uneasy sensation in his heart. The girl was a puzzle to him. A girl who possessed more than ordinary intelligence, rarely gifted in many respects, but of all religious duties and obligations was as ignorant as any heathen savage. It seemed incredible.

The night came at last when Mam'selle was to see for the first time the inside of a theatre, and witness a real play. She could hardly believe it possible. At last, at last, she should see with her own eyes the marvelous wonders with which she had in imagination peopled the temples of the Thespian art.

Seated in a stage box at Alaric Brandon's side, she immediately became absorbed in the play, much to the amusement of Althea, who in company with Mrs. Winter, made up the small party.

"Such an exhibition," sneered Althea, maliciously. "Look at her, Valerie. Alaric, you will make yourself the subject of remark by going out with a savage like this girl."

"Very well," returned Alaric, good naturedly, "I can bear it; in fact, I rather like it. And as for 'remarks,' what do you think, Althea? Mam'-

selle has created quite a sensation among our set already! Aubrey Arleigh, the famous journalist, together with one or two of the exclusives has begged to be presented to Mam'selle. The bishop too is deeply interested in her. But of course I put Arleigh and the others off. She must meet nobody yet; she is too young."

"And—her *gaucherie* is something painful," interpolated Miss Marsden, sneeringly. "Just look at her; she is crying like a baby."

"Well—who could help it, unless they are seasoned theatre goers, like you and me? Althea, you forgot that the play is Hamlet, and that Ophelia is one of the *rôles* in which poor little Mam'selle has been long interested. Ophelia's mad scene and her death are truly affecting, and if you glance around you, you will see that this poor untaught girl is not alone in her emotion. Opposite, sits a famous judge; I have been watching him surreptitiously wiping his eyes during the scene. Don't be hard and harsh, Althea; it is not becoming, and it is not kind, dear."

The last, unwonted, tender word had its own effect upon the irate beauty. She ceased to scold, and once more turned her listless attention to the stage, and the play now drawing to a close. The curtain went down upon the last act, but still Mam'selle sat like one in a dream, utterly oblivious to surroundings. Alaric touched her arm gently.

"Mam'selle! Why, what is the matter with the child? It is over now, the play is done. We are going home."

She started as though with a sudden shock, and the great, dark eyes were full of pathetic pain.

"*Oh!*" with a long drawn sigh which ended in silence. She arose and drew her wrap closely about her shoulders; then they all passed out together from the theatre, out into the crisp starry night. Not a word passed Mam'selle's lips. She was like one in a dream, and seemed incapable of speech. Once within the carriage, driving homeward, Alaric who sat opposite at Althea's side, leaned over and touched Mam'selle's hand.

"Well, what do you think of the theatre, Mam'selle, and the real stage?" he asked, softly. "Shall you ever be able to hold your own upon it, think you, my child?"

The girl's great eyes flashed even through the semi-darkness; Alaric Brandon could see the light that flashed into them, then faded away again.

"I can *try*," she replied, gravely; "one thing, monsieur, I observed. The woman in the play—she was not intense enough; she played her part mechanically. She *acted* her part; she was not Ophelia."

"Bravo! Mam'selle! There is indeed a real distinction between *acting* and *being*."

"What absurd nonsense," sneered Althea.

"Every one knows that an actor is not expected to *be* the character that he portrays, even for the brief time that he is portraying it. If it were so indeed, what miserable lives the poor wretches would lead."

"But, it is grand to live for one's art," flashed Mam'selle, swiftly. "It is all *I* shall live for. It is all that I have to live for," she added, softly. And then the carriage stopped and they were home once more.

A fairy repast of dainty confections and costly wines was waiting in Mrs. Winter's *boudoir*. But Mam'selle could neither eat nor drink; she still seemed like one in a dream; and at length begged to be permitted to retire.

It was long past midnight when Valerie Winter stole softly up the flight of stairs which led to the girl's chamber, urged on by some impulse which she could not understand. The sound of a voice —low and passionate—within Mam'selle's room made Valerie halt in unfeigned surprise. The door stood slightly ajar, and there, all alone at this late hour, Mam'selle was going over the scenes which had touched her most in the play. It was wonderful how her memory had grasped and retained so much; nearly the entire play; all the sadness and pathos. The listener outside the door felt a wild enthusiasm which was almost reverence for this true genius. Low under her breath, she whispered eagerly:—

"She is her father's own child, God bless her! How the traits, the characteristics, the genius, and—alas! *the sins* of the fathers, descend upon the children, 'even to the third and fourth generation.'"

She sighed heavily, as she crept stealthily away and descended the stairs to her own room to her bed, where she lay until almost day—dawn, sleepless, wild-eyed, and suffering. Many a fair woman who had looked upon Valerie Winter that night, in her box at the Grand Opera House, had felt a quiver of envy steal over their hearts. She was so beautiful, so unapproachable; so very, very wealthy. In her exalted position, nothing mean or sordid could come near her. And yet the poorest, the lowliest in all the great city might thank God that she was not like Valerie Winter —"a woman with a past."

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE VEIL IS RENT.

THE sonorous voice of the organ resounded through the grand Cathedral, and stirred Mam'selle's untutored heart to its depths. Seated in the Winters' pew, one of the most prominent and fashionable in the sacred edifice, the girl decided with a little thrill of awe, that surely this was heaven. What a grand place it was! She who had never entered a place of worship before in all her life, save the tumble down, barnlike chapel in the heart of the forest, where twice a year, a priest came, usually against his will, to mumble over the mass, and hurry through the solemn ceremonies of the Catholic religion, only too eager to shake the dust of that benighted region from his feet, and return to the city with its congenial surroundings and creature comforts. Christ sent forth his beloved disciples to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel," provided with neither gold, nor silver, nor fine raiment, expecting them to follow his own sacred example. "The foxes have holes; the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."

But, that was long ago; such humiliation and self-denial does not become the modern clergy. Now-a-days, neither priest nor minister is satisfied without a grand and costly edifice in which to conduct divine service. It seems a case of "give, and take." The more show and ostentation you give, the more religion is yours for the taking. We pay for what we get in this world, even within the sacred walls of God's house:—

> "Earth gets its price for what earth gives us,
> The beggar is taxed for a corner to die in,
> The priest hath his fee, who comes and shrives us;
> We bargain for the graves we lie in."

And, how *can* one properly worship God in a poor, mean sanctuary? Modern religion demands the grandest and costliest of everything. Yet, there was once a handful of holy men who worshiped God in the open air, "a temple not made with hands," when persecution and the sword had driven them away from their own country, willing exiles and martyrs to the Christian faith. Surely they were nearer Heaven than the pompous Christian who pays an exorbitant price for the privilege of worshiping in a Cathedral, and reveling in the odor of sanctity.

The music went straight to Mam'selle's heart. It thrilled and filled her with deepest awe; a wild feeling of rapture. Her hand stole softly into Mrs. Winter's, and the great, dark eyes heavy

with tears,—for Mam'selle was far too intense and excitable to control all outward emotion,—met the gaze of Alaric Brandon, who occupied a seat in the Winters' pew. Then, Mam'selle's gaze wandered to Althea's face; Althea, who in all the glories of a fresh toilette—dainty and costly —was just sailing down the aisle. And then, the bishop in his robe, appeared; and after that all seemed vague and unreal to Mam'selle. The kneeling figures; the chorus of voices arising heavenward in the grand old confession.

"We have erred and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep. We have offended against thy holy laws; we have left undone those things which we ought to have done. And we have done those things which we ought not to have done. Have mercy upon us, miserable offenders."

The strange sweetness of the service appealed to the girl's imagination. How strange and sweet it all seemed!

Yet there, a few feet away, humble and contrite apparently knelt Althea; Althea who had been in a shocking bad humor all the morning, and all because a certain new gown,—a charming creation from one of New Orleans' leading *modistes* had not come home in time to be displayed at church. The costume that she wore was perfect in every detail; but it was not the one in which she had set her heart to appear that morning, and Althea's temper was at fever heat accordingly. Yet, there

she knelt, looking as sedate as a novice, as religious ..s a saint, at Alaric's side with her ivory and gold prayer-book open at the Litany, in both pearl grey gloved hands; her fair head bent meekly, the long golden lashes sweeping the pink tinted cheeks. She looked like a nun at her orisons, while the sweet, low voice, erstwhile raised in angry vituperation over the short-comings of Madame *La Modiste*, rang out clearly and distinctly in the heart-broken cry:—"Have mercy upon us, miserable sinners!"

She was a heartless, soulless woman; a fashion plate and a sham. She was powdered and painted, and blondined and padded; but she looked like a stray seraph, who had lost her way out of Paradise, and was far too good for earth.

The morning prayers over, the bishop began his discourse. It was deep, and profound, and learned; it abounded in beautiful *similes* and elegant metaphors; it was as glittering and polished as ice, and just about as satisfying to the hungry heart.

Mam'selle listened, all her soul in her eyes, which never ceased their study of the speaker's face.

"If I could only understand it," the child's eager heart sighed wearily; "I do so want to learn how to be good, and where to find God."

But she would never find Him by any light that the bishop might throw upon the subject. He

was too occupied with hyperbole and brilliant erudition to find words of comfort to a child's ignorant heart. His sermon was like a flashing meteor, flitting over the face of the sky, and lost in profound darkness. No help for Mam'selle there. She followed Mrs. Winter out of the Cathedral, when the service was over, and entered the waiting carriage. Stephen Winter had not attended church that day; so Alaric accepted the vacant seat at Althea's side, and they drove rapidly homeward.

Mam'selle spoke never a word; and Alaric too, seemed under a spell of silence. But once, Althea, glancing at the girl caught sight of her rapt expression as she sat with her eyes riveted upon Alaric's face; in their depths a something—*something* which made Althea start nervously, then grow white and still. *She knew at last.*

She read in the innocent eyes of the girl before her, the whole secret of which Mam'selle herself was perfectly ignorant.

"The little hypocrite!" hissed Althea, under her breath, her gloved hands clenching the ivory prayer-book viciously, "I see it all at last! Now, may Heaven help her, for I shall show her no mercy!"

Two hours later, Mam'selle sitting alone in her little room with an open prayer-book before her, trying—trying hard to find a little comfort somewhere between its covers, heard a rap at her door;

and calling softly "Come in!" was surprised to see Althea. Mam'selle laid the prayer-book down upon the table before her, and smiled sweetly:—

"Come in, Miss Marsden," she said, "will you have a seat?"

Arising as she spoke, and wheeling forward her most comfortable chair. Althea gave her a glance full of contempt.

"No; I prefer standing!" she said, coldly. "I have called upon you, Mam'selle Nobody, (I once overheard Mr. Orme address you by that very appropriate name) I have come here to put a question to you. It is this: How dare you *pose* as a martyr before Mr. Brandon, and play the *ingenue* and—and make love to him boldly and openly before the eyes of the world, he—my betrothed husband? How dare you—I say—you—miserable little upstart, you backwoods heathen!"

Utterly overwhelmed, Mam'selle leaned heavily against the window casing. The small face was pale as death, and the beautiful dark eyes full of pain and wordless wonder and amaze.

"I—I do not understand you, Miss Marsden," she faltered, her heart beating tumultuously with an unknown dread, "I do not know what you mean—I have never thought of posing as a martyr, or—any thing else, and the—the other thing you mention—" She stopped short and the red blood crimsoned her pale cheek.

"The other thing I mention," mimicked Miss

Marsden, malignantly; "I suppose you will plead ignorance of that too, of course. But you do not blind or deceive me—not a particle. Why, it is as plain as any thing *can* be, that you are dead in love with Alaric Brandon, who is to be my husband in six months' time. In love with him; *you*, a creature without a name; a charity pupil who aspires to the stage; you—a nobody—a veritable heathen! *You love Alaric Brandon!*"

It crashed down upon the girl's brain like a descending avalanche. Darkness crept over her; there was a sound in her ears like the falling of distant waters; while the cold hard voice of her tormentor went on and on, sounding far off and muffled, yet all the time horribly distinct to the tortured heart of the girl, standing face to face with *the truth* at last. She sunk helplessly into a seat; her head fell forward and rested upon her arms, folded upon the marble table. Over her heart there swept and surged a mighty flood, like the floods of the south, when the rivers are choked and swollen, and overflow their banks, bringing the *debris* and alluvial deposit to the surface; then rushing on, madly on, without power of restraint, carrying every thing before them. There was a horrible sense of shame, utter, nameless shame, in the pure, guileless heart.

The truth rudely, coarsely exposed, stared her in the face; she *knew* at last. It was true, all true. This was—this must be *love* for Alaric

Brandon, which filled her heart to overflowing; Alaric Brandon—who belonged by every tie of *honor*, to Althea Marsden.

Before this truth, the girl's pure soul recoiled in horror and amazement at the sin so unwittingly committed.

Slowly—painfully she dragged herself over to the spot where Althea stood, scornfully aloof, staring down upon the abject figure with cold, contemptuous unfeeling eyes. Prone upon the floor at the proud woman's feet the girl knelt in anguish and humiliation. It never once occurred to her to deny the allegation. It was truth; intuitively the child's soul recognized it, as the child's heart sprang up full grown, and faced its doom. It was truth, and it blinded and dazzled her; yet being *truth*, it could not be denied.

"Oh, Miss Marsden!" she pleaded, lifting her clasped hands with wild beseeching, "I never knew, I never dreamed of such a thing. Please believe me and—forgive me—will you not? I did not mean to do wrong; I—did not indeed!"

She was trembling like a leaf, grasping nervously at the hem of Althea's silken robe with her little shaking hands.

Miss Marsden stooped and calmly disengaged her skirts, as though the girl's touch were pollution.

"You are not fit to live!" she said, in a low, level scornful voice, "you are not fit to remain in

the house with honest people! Don't dare to touch me. What will Mr. Brandon say, what will he *think* of you, when I have told him all?"

The girl wrung her hands frantically, and a shudder passed over her slender figure. "You would not," she cried, wildly, "oh, surely, you would never be so cruel! No woman *could* be so hard upon another!"

A sneering smile parted Miss Marsden's lips. No pity, no compassion stirred her heart for the forsaken little creature; her jealousy was aroused; that attribute which is "as cruel as the grave."

"It is my duty to tell him," she returned, coldly, "and I promise you I will do my duty. He is coming here this evening; I shall tell him the whole story. How he will laugh at your presumption, you miserable little nobody!"

And as she spoke, she glided swiftly from the room, and closed the door behind her.

For a time Mam'selle lay upon the carpet, prone upon her face, her slight form shaking with a storm of passionate grief. She did not shed a tear; her eyes were dry—quite dry—but there was a look in their tearless depths which would make a tender heart weep.

Slowly—painfully—she arose to her feet. Going over to the wardrobe, she took from it a plain little hat which she placed upon her head. Her eyes were shining with a wild unnatural light, her breath coming and going in gasps of pain.

"I must go," she muttered, huskily, "I must leave here before *he* comes. I cannot—dare not stay and face him. That cruel woman will tell him—and—it is true! I never knew it before, but I see now, I love him! I love him! I have loved him from the first!"

She stole timidly down the stairs and out of the house; out into the great cruel city she went, going she knew not whither.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE MOCKERY OF HOPE.

Half blinded with the storm of tears which rushed at last to her eyes, the girl hastened on down the long street, lying quiet in the hush of the Sabbath afternoon. Her heart was sore and heavy with the knowledge of her own error; for, to the pure white soul this love which was in the eyes of the world unlawful, seemed the blackest, most unpardonable sin.

On she hastened, unconsciously moving faster as she left the fashionable avenue where the Winter mansion was situated, far behind. Her long experience in the pine woods had made her an able pedestrian, and the afternoon was not half gone, when she found herself in the quaint French quarter of the old Crescent city. She paused at last, fatigued and spent with her long walk, her heart still groping in humiliation; while darkness like a shadow rested upon her soul. If only she could find rest and peace. If only she could die, and go to heaven. Ah! where was heaven? Or, was there really such a place; and if so, how could she reach it? How set about to win her way into its lasting rest?

Poor, benighted young heathen; after all, her doubts, and fears, and conjectures, are not unknown to the so-called Christian, who walks on in the straight and narrow path, beset upon all sides by doubts, and daily wrestling with the evil one.

Down a retired street at length, Mam'selle turned mechanically, because it looked quiet and deserted. All at once she saw before her a tall, arched iron gate set in a high brick wall. The gate stood invitingly open, and pausing in child-like wonder, Mam'selle beheld a cool, shady retreat. Was it a little bit of the tropics transplanted here, set down in the midst of the noisy, dusty, wicked city—like one pure thought in the depths of a sinner's heart? It was silent, and cool, and shady; so shady that it suggested twilight, with tall, tropical palms and century plants, wreathed about with twining passion flowers. In the midst, a tiny fountain threw aloft its silvery spray, keeping everything deliciously cool. Over all, there was a faint suggestive fragrance, the fragrance of freshly turned earth, and the evening incense of lilies. A tall, dark building built of brick, over which the damp had lain a delicate green mould, arose from the centre of this shade and coolness. The entire front of the building was covered with Japan ivy, reaching out its delicate tendrils and grasping the crumbling bricks tenaciously. An air of pro-

found quiet,—like the silence of the palace of the Seven Sleepers, rested over the scene.

Led by some impulse the girl entered the open gate on tiptoe, as though afraid of being seen and reproved. She passed up the broad, beautifully kept gravel walk, which led to the open door, and there she paused.

It was evidently a religious retreat. She saw before her, kneeling upon the hard, bare floor, a dozen men, clad in coarse black gowns, their hands folded reverently, while one with a voice low and soft as the music of distant bells, repeated fervently, earnestly, the prayers of the Catholic church. Instinctively, Mam'selle comprehended. Upon her knees, on the hard gravel walk outside, she fell, and listened while the low, earnest voice went on, in solemn beseeching.

Half an hour later, Mam'selle arose to her feet, and found herself standing in the presence of the one who had prayed. His face was very calm, and wore a look of perfect peace. A feeling of awe crept over the girl's heart. She bowed her head, and felt afraid.

"Child," his voice was hard and cold, yet it was plain to see that she was suffering. "What would you here? We are brethren preparing to enter the Dominican Order; we are in retreat, and it is not well and seemly for the outside world to intrude. But," a little human sympathy softening his stern voice, "you are in trouble, perhaps?"

As Mam'selle, no longer able to restrain her grief, sunk upon a wooden bench near, and bowing her head, wept bitterly. The Brother turned aside. "Child, you must purge yourself of all such weakness," he said, calmly. "Do penance for your sins; crucify self; be austere; scourge your body for your soul's sake, see!"

With a swift movement he drew aside the coarse black gown which he wore, and she saw beneath it a garment made of haircloth, stiff, coarse; a very scourge to the flesh. The girl's quick eyes caught sight of the blood which clotted and stained the garment where it had tortured the tender body beneath. Her eyes grew large and dark with horror.

"It is dreadful," she cried; "yet I—I would do *anything*, if I could be forgiven for the sin that I have committed. Oh, monsieur—"

"We are all brethren, here," he interposed, coldly. "I am called Brother Anselmo."

"Brother," her voice low and trembling, "I have done wrong, unintentional wrong. I declare to you, I never once dreamed that I was so wicked; until to-day—when another person—a lady, a great and beautiful lady, with a heart of stone, told me the truth about myself. I—Brother—" her cheek crimson, her slight form trembling, "I wish to confess my sin. I have learned to love some one—a good man who—"

"Speak not that word here!" intervened the Brother, harshly, "in this holy retreat we know only one love, the love of the Divine. We are here to mortify the flesh, to scourge our bodies, and purify our souls. If you would be forgiven for your sins—go home—go back to the place from which you came, and fast and pray, and do penance. Scourge your tender flesh with the rod; spare yourself no humiliation; be cruel, unfeeling —as far as your own sufferings are concerned; let *nothing* be too hard or harsh for your punishment. Then, if God hears you, He may heed you, and grant you pardon—"

He paused, and the words died upon his lips. She had arisen to her feet, and stood facing him, pale and still.

"I have been told that He is a God of *love*." The girl's voice rang out clear and denunciatory. "Brother—I do not believe it, if He demands of his children—the creatures whom He has made—that they hurt their bodies, and scourge their flesh, and do violence to the work of His own hands. He created us. He gave us life—why should self murder be acceptable in His eyes? Oh! Brother—is there no *loving* God, no tender Master to serve and follow? I have been told to pray to God. I cry aloud to Him; but He never hears or heeds me! the very sky is like brass—above my head. He does not care! Will no one show me the way to a *loving* God? Will no one help me? Will no

hand be outstretched to lead me on? Oh! Brother I am alone, alone!"

"We are brethren of a Holy Order," the Dominican's voice was cold and stern, "we are preparing to enter a state of perfect purity and peace; and this is our sanctuary—our retreat. We admit no one from the outside world within our gates. You have found your way inside, through a door left open carelessly; there is no help for you here. Go!"

The girl's sore heart grew numb and cold.

"No help," she murmured, faintly, "none! No help from man; and God will not hear me." She bowed her head and went silently forth. The tall iron gate clanged sharply after her, and she heard the key turn in its lock. She halted for a moment under the golden glory of the sunset sky.

"So! that is religion," she mused, bitterly, "I do well to have none of it. It is all alike false and hollow. No love, no tenderness for a fellow sinner; no hand outstretched to save or help; no tender word of pity. All deception, mockery, hypocrisy. It is only a huge glittering sham."

And as she turned away, the girl's heart was crushed and heavy with exceeding bitter sorrow, and the shadow of gathering despair.

CHAPTER XX.

ASHES OF ROSES.

As she stood there, a groan fell upon the silence; faint moans as of some one suffering bodily pain. The girl glanced swiftly around her. Just adjoining the tall, brick walled grounds of the Dominican Retreat there stood an old house—a tumble down Creole Cottage—with drooping eaves, moss grown and lichen covered. From the open door which led straight out upon the pavement, low moans of suffering floated to her ears. Without a moment's hesitation, she turned and entered the open door. What she saw there, would never leave her memory until her dying day.

Upon a bed in one corner of the poorly furnished room, damp and cheerless, and stifling, in the midsummer sunshine, a woman was lying, an old woman with snow white hair, and sunken blue eyes, and wan, pinched features. At sight of the girl she uttered a cry of relief.

"God bless you!" she moaned, feebly; "you have come to me in my dying hour. I feared that I must die alone, somehow I shrank from the thought of it. There is no one to stay with me; the neighbors are all at church; and no one knows how ill I am."

Mam'selle came swiftly to the bedside, and took the woman's hand in her own. It was cold, with an icy chill.

"Poor thing," said the girl, gently, "what can I do for you?"

"Nothing," shaking her white head, feebly, "only—I do not want to die alone. You will stay a little while with me, will you not? You need not fear contagion; it is only consumption." Only consumption!

Mam'selle's eyes rested upon the white face with intense pity. With eager haste, she threw aside her hat and gloves, and found some water, with which she bathed the dying woman's brow. The sunken eyes rested upon the girl's grave, pitiful face.

"I am so sorry for you," Mam'selle said, softly, "can nothing be done to help you?"

"No, child. And indeed, I would not wish any thing done. I am going home, my dear—going home."

"Where?" A look of rapture lit up the poor pinched face.

"To my Father's house, in that beautiful land, where those who are weary, shall find rest," the dying woman answered. "There, I shall join the one I love."

"Why are you here alone?" ventured Mam'selle, after a brief pause; "have you no friends, no relations?"

The dying woman shook her head. "No, dear, no one. I am 'the last leaf upon the tree.' The names of all once dear to me are moss grown on their tombstones now. I am the last; and oh, I am *so glad* to go."

There was a look of intense happiness upon the poor pale face, and the weak voice trembled with eagerness.

"Child, you look surprised," she went on slowly, "but stop a moment and reflect. I have seen more than threescore years. For forty long, long years, I have lived in this house, fighting my way through the world with that frail, weak weapon, the needle. All I love are gone before me; I am alone. It is a law of nature that we cling to life, our poor, miserable, transitory lives here below, but when all that makes life worth living is gone, is it not natural that we should long to go too? Child, have you ever loved anyone, loved one human being so dearly, that there is no happiness or peace for you,—only where he is?"

The girl's head drooped, and a sharp pang of shame contracted her heart. Did this woman know of her love for Alaric Brandon? Then, her sin must be patent to the eyes of the world. Everyone who beheld her, must be enabled to read her secret, the secret of her guilty love for the man who was to be Althea Marsden's husband. The very thought brought exquisite pain to the girl's sensitive heart, and wrung it with fresh tor-

ture. The dying woman went on :—"Such is the love that has lived in my heart, all these long, lonely years, for my Willie—my dark-eyed, tender-hearted Willie. When he first came into my life, I was no longer a girl, for I had seen thirty years and more; but,—he loved me. To him my face was fair, my voice soft and sweet, my eyes true and tender. Child, such love is deathless; it is immortal; it can no more die, than the souls which God has given us.

"We loved each other; trusted and lived for each other. Then, the war broke out, that cruel war between brethren, and we who lived in the South, took sides with the South, quite naturally. And so, he went to the war,—in his grey uniform, with his sword by his side,—my Willie,—my dark-eyed hero,—and all the love of my life went with him. Every tendril of my heart was twined around his. What was I without him—oh, my Love of Loves? But, duty called him, and he went, and in the very first battle, dear, he fell, fell with the bullets fired into his breast. Thirty years ago, child; thirty long dark, dreary years, during which I have gained my slender living, dragging out my life alone, in this gloomy old house, looking forward ever, to the end. But, the long cruel separation is almost over now, and I shall be with my loved one before many hours. Child, will you lift the pillow, and give me the little box you will find there? I wish it placed in the coffin with me."

With trembling hands, Mam'selle lifted the pillow, and found a tiny box hidden away beneath the coarse but snowy linen. The girl placed the box within the cold, shaking hand. Slowly and feebly, she opened the lid. A faint, faint odor of dead rose leaves—the very phantom of an odor—was perceptible.

"See, child," the pale lips could hardly frame the words, she was so nearly gone; "this is—or was—a rose; it is only the ghost of one now! He gave it to me when he came to say good-by—my Willie,—my beautiful lover Willie. How noble he looked, with his great dark eyes gazing into mine, as he placed the rose in my hand; and the tears rushed to his eyes as he said farewell; holding me close to his heart with tender, loving kisses. Then, his face brightened with hope, as he spoke of our meeting, when the war should be over, and peace reign again in the land.

"'We *shall* meet again, my darling,' he said, 'sooner or later, in God's own time. If not on earth,—up there!'

"And then, darkness fell over me, and there was the sound of footsteps going from me,—always going from me,—never coming back; and a great silence fell. I awoke at last under the pale stars; and I held this rose in my hand where he had left it, and—I was alone!

"I have been alone ever since, dear—thirty long, lonesome years, with only the ashes of a rose to

bring back the past; but God has never once forsaken me."

"He never came back, your lover," mused Mam'selle, thoughtfully, "and you have lived to grow old, like this, yet you have never forgotten?" A pained look crept into the dying eyes.

"Forgotten!" she repeated, gently; "why, child, I *loved* him! Can one who truly loves, ever forget?" Mam'selle sighed.

"Might it not be possible that he was not killed in battle, that he is not dead?" she suggested, timidly, after a pause.

The sad eyes met hers, with a look of calm, incredulous surprise. "Not dead? Why, dear, *he never came back to me!* You do not understand. When one loves as he loved, as I love him—one never thinks of falseness. That would be base indeed! Child, God gave us love, the one immortal boon, as immortal as God himself. He would never let such love as this be born into our hearts, and live there for more than a quarter of a century, only to mock, and mislead, and delude. God is too just, too pure; why, child—*He himself is love.*"

"Tell me," whispered the girl, falteringly, "tell me all about Him! I have been seeking Him everywhere. I have been groping in the dark trying to find Him, until I am lost."

A great hush fell. Then the dying woman lifted her failing voice, and there in that squalid

room, from which the day had faded into night, and with only the poor mockery of light from a single tallow-candle flickering feebly in a brass candle-stick, words were spoken which sunk into the girl's heart, and filled forever the void there. For the first time, Mam'selle learned the belief of the true Christian, unfettered by creed or form, unclogged by denomination, or tenet or dogma; belief in the true, *loving* God, who is a tender Father, not a cruel task master.

The wondrous story was told; told by dying lips which could not speak falsely. The wonderful story of God's love for the poorest and meanest of His creatures, was told in the simple language of a childlike faith which had lasted through long years of toil and separation, and sorrow, keeping alive in the weary old heart the love which God had sent to her as a Heaven sent gift. Slowly, Mam'selle's heart opened and received the truth. She could understand *this*. This was not the glittering generalities of the wise and learned, but a simple story, emphasized by the pure and blameless life just drawing to a close.

"Only believe," her lips were growing rigid now, but still she strove to speak, "only *believe*, child! God is good and merciful. He is a loving God, and hateth nothing that He has made. Cling to Him; cling to His cross, cling with both hands, and never let it go! Have faith—only faith—"

The weak voice faltered and broke, and was

still. The moments dragged by; but all alone with the dying woman, Mam'selle watched, and there was no fear in her heart. Once, a neighbor had come to the door; glanced within, and seeing Mam'selle at the bedside, had hastened away.

The long hours dragged slowly by, midnight came, and passed. All at once, the sightless eyes flared open wide, and a smile of ineffable sweetness touched the cold lips.

"Willie!" she murmured faintly, and who shall say that she did not see him, the dark-eyed lover, to whom she had been true all her long lonely life? "You have—come—oh, my Love!"

The eyelids drooped over the weary eyes, but the smile lingered upon her lips; and so—still smiling—death took her in his icy arms. "The old, old fashion—*death!* Thank God for that older fashion yet, of Immortality."

She lay there, cold and still, with the ashes of a dead rose—all that remained of a love that had lived, clasped close in her cold, still hand.

Morning crept in, gray and pallid, shivering a little as it came. It laid light ghostly fingers upon the dead face on the pillow, the poor tired face, which would rest now, with weary eyes forever closed; upon the stiffened lips that smile of perfect peace. The one candle had burned down long ago, flickering into the socket, and going slowly out, like the life of the woman who lay there dead. But the gray darkness of the dawn

held no terrors for Mam'selle. Upon her heart a living light shone now, illuminating all its darkness. She felt no more fears for the future. God had forgiven her sin: had pardoned her for loving Alaric Brandon.

In the gloom and darkness of that wretched hovel, a light had been born; she knew now the meaning of God's love, and pity, and pardoning grace. In the kinship of suffering, the truth had come to her.

Out of the barren soil of Mam'selle's heart, the seed which the dead woman had planted, sprang up suddenly, like a grain of mustard. She had found the one thing needful: — *faith in God!*

Four o'clock rang out from the nearest steeple. Mam'selle arose from her knees, and drew the sheet over the cold, white face upon the pillow. At that moment, the bell in the Dominican Retreat pealed forth loudly the call to morning prayer.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALTHEA.

In the pale light of the early morning, Mam'selle found her way back to the Winter mansion. But first she aroused the nearest neighbor with the sad story of the poor life just ended; and the body was left in charge of the women of the house.

Arrived at the elegant home of Valerie Winter, the girl found a sleepy servant just opening the outer doors, and without being observed by that functionary, she stole into the house by a side entrance, and reached her own room unseen. Once there she removed her hat, and changed her dress for a wrapper, after which she threw herself upon her bed, and was soon asleep.

She awoke, with the bright sunshine streaming in at the windows, and a light in her heart that was brighter than the sunshine. She arose and fell upon her knees. For the first time in her life, her ignorant, untaught life, Mam'selle prayed to the living God. No images,—no imitation. She went straight to God's feet, and knelt there, —humbly—contritely; she told Him all her sorrows and cares, poured forth the whole story into

His listening ears, even as the woman who died, had bade her.

And God heard her prayer. Later, she stole down-stairs and rapped at Mrs. Winter's door.

"Come in!" called Valerie, softly, and Mam'selle entered.

Mrs. Winter, in a soft white wrapper, was seated at a tiny table, sipping *café noir* from a Sevres cup.

"Mam'selle!" Her voice had a ring of displeasure in it. "Come here, and tell me where you were all night! Of course I knew you were not here! I—I went to your room last night,—I always do—before I retire; and—child—imagine my feelings to find you gone! What I have suffered all this long dark night—no one knows—no—one——" She broke off suddenly, —"No matter! Tell me all. I know you will tell me the truth."

"I will, indeed!" said Mam'selle, sweetly, "I have never told a falsehood in my life! If you will listen, I will tell you all!" She knelt at Mrs. Winter's side, and rested her arms upon the arm of the chair. Then, in a subdued voice she repeated the whole story; only omitting the accusation which Althea had brought against her. She *could not* speak of that; and after all, it was her own sin, and God had forgiven her. When the story was finished, Mrs. Winter arose.

"We will have our breakfast at once," she

said, "and then I will go with you to that poor woman, and will see that she is decently buried. Oh, Mam'selle! Mam'selle! how much sorrow and suffering there is in the world!"

She choked back something like a sob, and her eyes were full of tears. Mam'selle kissed the white hand, eagerly—passionately.

"You are an angel, madame," she cried. "Oh! how good God is, to give me such a friend!"

"Hush! If you knew—oh Mam'selle! may the day never come, when your lips will curse me!"

"*Madame!*"

"There! there!" Valerie's white hand patted the bowed head lovingly. "Say no more. I am nervous and unstrung since last night. Mam'selle, I was half mad; I was only waiting this morning for the opportunity (I am not the mistress of my own actions) to send for a detective to search for you! Thank God—oh thank God!—You are safe!"

An hour later, the Winters' carriage drew up before that poor hovel, which the presence of death had dignified. Mrs. Winter assumed all responsibility and the dead woman was buried away in a pleasant corner of Greenwood, with the ashes of a dead rose clasped in the hands folded upon the silent heart.

After all was over, and they had returned home, Mam'selle sought Mrs. Winter in the

pretty room where she sometimes received her visitors, and preferred an unexpected request.

"Madame," her voice faltering with a sudden fear lest Mrs. Winter should suspect her secret, "may I go at once into Prof. Bernard's school? True, the fourteen days are not yet passed, but, somehow I feel a desire to get to work and—surely, there can be no objection to my going?"

Valerie's face had grown pale. "None at all," she returned, "only the sorrow of losing you, Mam'selle. I will confess that you have made a better woman of me, and helped me in a way of which you do not dream."

"*I? Madame*, you are jesting. How could an ignorant girl like me be of use to *you?*"

"Don't ask me! Then, dear—since you wish to go, it may be as well. And by the way, I am expecting Prof. Bernard directly. I will lay the matter before him, and if he is willing I shall no longer object."

"Thank you! I will try—oh so hard—to merit your goodness."

Her voice was low, her face sad and thoughtful. Mrs. Winter thought that she had never seen so sad a look upon so young a face. At that very moment Prof. Bernard was announced. It was merely a formal call that he was about to make; for the Professor was quite popular in the gilded *salons* of fashionable society, where it was the fad to lionize the old man. The dainty ladies raved

and hung over him, *a la* Paderewiski, until it was simply ludicrous. His blunt, uncouth manner was pronounced delightfully *chic;* his disregard for certain little amenities of civilized life was quoted as praiseworthy—because he was all the rage. Even his carelessness concerning personal appearance was voted as "quite too awfully cute. For anything is excusable in a genius." Meaning, of course—a genius who *is the fashion.*

Althea, passing through the hall when the professor was announced at Mrs. Winter's sitting-room door, glanced after the bulky figure as the door closed behind him, and her face grew pale, and her eyes flashed with a light which would have startled her sister, could she have seen it.

"There is some secret understanding between Valerie and Bernard," she muttered, "and I am going to find out what it is, if I *die* in the attempt. It concerns that pine woods heathen, and I'll find it out, or—"

As she spoke she heard a door close at the further end of the hall.

"Stephen is home," she went on, eagerly; "I believe I'll go to him; his suspicions are already aroused. Now is my time; I will strike at once; for I mean to get rid of that girl *forever.*"

In the meantime, within Mrs. Winter's pretty sitting-room Mam'selle's request had been presented to the professor. She wished to go at once

to the institution, and be received as a pupil. The great man listened politely.

"I see no objection, my dear Mrs. Winter," he returned, "since it is the young lady's wish. Dear! Dear! She is an eager student; and I am certain—quite certain—that the world will never see a more perfect actress, if her future fulfills the promise of the present. But, Mrs. Winter," his keen eyes studying the cold, proud face, "has it ever occurred to you that the young lady must have a name? She might go upon the stage as Mam'selle, but that would not be a fitting cognomen with which to enter my institution." Valerie started and turned deathly pale.

"She must have a name—certainly," she returned. "And, really, Prof. Bernard, I do not know her true one. Suppose I give her my own for a Christian name? Valerie! Yes—that would do; and for a surname, *Lawrence*, that's it! I have a liking for the name of Lawrence; it is rather pretty. Very well, then; the girl shall be known as *Valerie Lawrence*."

And then, lifting her eyes she saw standing in the open door—her husband, Stephen Winter. And the look upon his face was enough to make the blood congeal about her heart, it was so full of hatred and bitter, bitter anger.

CHAPTER XXII.

SEBASTIAN ORME SPEAKS.

STEPHEN WINTER'S crafty little eyes were fixed upon his wife's pale face, which betrayed abject terror. He advanced into the room.

"Ah, good-day, Professor," he began, blandly, addressing himself to Bernard, "so, you find time for occasional calls? Glad to see you; and," as the professor just touched the extended hand with the tips of his pudgy fingers, "may I inquire the subject under discussion? Was it not this young person who has come down upon my home like the traditional wolf on the fold, and revolutionized my quiet household?"

Under ordinary circumstances, Mam'selle would have rushed to her own rescue, with a fiery retort; but something—some feeling—sweet and gentle, made her hold her peace now; and she said nothing.

"Pray explain, Mrs. Winter," the tyrant continued, turning to his wife with a look upon his face which she knew well, too well; "why do you feel such extraordinary interest in this girl? And who—I ask of you, if it is a fair question—has provided for her dramatic education, under such

a fashionable and expensive master as Professor Bernard?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Winter," the professor cut in sharply, "the young lady has been taken in charge by certain charitably disposed people, who are likewise lovers of the drama, and who can detect the wonderful genius in this girl. It is all right, Mr. Winter, I assure you! Well, young lady," turning to Mam'selle as he spoke, "I shall look for you to-morrow at ten. Is that too soon?"

"Oh, no! no indeed!" cried Mam'selle, eagerly. "I will be there, sir."

And then, a little hurriedly, for the astute professor could detect the signs of a domestic storm brewing, Bernard bowed himself out.

And then, the storm burst. Stephen Winter's coarse nature reveled in the scene that followed. First sending Mam'selle from the room, he proceeded to heap upon the meekly bowed head of his wife every vile epithet that he could recall. He swore that she was plotting against him, and that there was some mystery connected with Mam'selle, and that he was determined to learn its nature. He gave full rein to his brutal anger, until he was utterly beside himself with rage; and at last, stung to madness by the meek silence with which Valerie received his vituperation, he raised his hand—(Yes, a "Christian *gentleman!*") and struck her a cruel blow upon the face. It

was not the first blow that he had given her; it would not be the last.

But, still she maintained silence; still she was dumb in regard to the question whose answer he rudely demanded,—"Who *is* this girl? And why are you so interested in her?"

At last, worn out by the might of his own mad passions, Stephen Winter desisted, and left her alone, the bitter loneliness of a breaking, despairing heart.

That evening, Mam'selle out in the grounds, wandering about, trying to feel hopeful over her coming departure, found herself face to face with Alaric Brandon. It was the first time that she had seen him since the fatal truth had crashed down upon her heart, the knowledge of her love for him, which Althea had coarsely revealed to her, as a sin. That sin,—ah, God had forgiven her, yet, she shrank from the glance of Alaric Brandon's dark eyes, like a guilty coward. He came swiftly toward her. "Mam'selle!" both hands outstretched, "why, child! what is this that I hear? That you are to leave us to-morrow? Can you not wait until the fortnight has expired, or are you too eager to get to work? Busy little bee! And there are so many drones in the hive."

Her eyes were downcast; her hand did not linger long in his. Then, she glanced into his face with a timid look.

"It is best for me to get to work, *monsieur*," she returned, "I have no right to be idle. I have no time to lose; and after all, the five years will soon be over."

"Yes; and we shall be so proud of you, Mam'selle; I shall be so proud of you, little girl." His voice growing low and tender.

"You will be married to—to Miss Marsden long before I see you again;" she observed. His face paled.

"I do not know. Of course we are betrothed, but—listen, child! I am in trouble, sore trouble. My mother is very ill in England, and has sent for me. It is spinal disease, and she may linger for years—a helpless invalid. It is my place to be with her; don't you think so, Mam'selle? I am her only child."

"It is indeed!" cried Mam'selle, earnestly. "Oh, monseiur, I am *so* sorry—so very sorry—for her and you. Miss Marsden will help you to take care of your mother, will she not?" His face grew dark.

"I have just come from an interview with her," he returned. "She is very much annoyed, very angry. How *can* anyone be angry with my poor mother for the terrible affliction that has come upon her? Althea says she does not care to tie herself to a sick woman's bedside; and—and—I am going to my mother, Mam'selle. That is all."

"You do right, monsieur. But surely Miss Marsden will relent. She loves you dearly."

"As well as it is in her nature to love anyone," he returned, moodily. "I have left the decision in her hands. She shall do as she sees fit. But, I sail on the *Cambria* for Liverpool, next Monday. Mam'selle, I have been thinking I will finish my play—the play I was writing in the pine woods, and you shall make your *debut* in it; will you?" Her eyes lit up with a beautiful light.

"I would be so glad, so happy," she answered, softly; "and the *rôle* of the heroine suits me. Oh, monsieur, I would be so happy to appear in that *rôle*."

"Then you shall, if old Bernard will consent. Ah! some one is coming. It is Orme! You will be holding quite a little reception here, the first thing you know, Mam'selle."

Her eyes turned slowly in the direction that he indicated, and her heart beat heavily in her breast with a dull indefinable terror as she saw Sebastian Orme coming slowly down the walk toward her. She had not met him since that night in the conservatory, when he had sworn to have revenge, because she had defended her own innocence and purity.

He came to her side, and held out a white hand, quite as though no unpleasent scene had marred their last meeting. Alaric moved slowly away down the long walk, and the two were virtually alone.

"Ah! Mam'selle Nobody," he began, *nonchalantly*, "I inquired for you, and Miss Marsden informed me that you leave to-morrow, for study and active preparation for a life on the boards Do you know, my dear Mam'selle, that you are walking straight into the lion's jaws? That no woman ever yet became an actress, even a successful actress, who did not burn in the fires of temptation? And there are so few—oh, so pitifully few—to whose souls the Red Mouse has not whispered. Ah! You do not know the legend. Shall I tell you of it? It is an old German superstition, that evil, the certain evil which allures all women sooner or later, enters the soul in the shape of a small red mouse. You will find mention of it in the Walpurgi's Night, Goethe's Faust. My dear, there is no Red Mouse visible in your white soul—but—beware."

"I do not understand you," she said, simply. "Nothing can ever hurt me now; for I have learned to trust in God." His face flushed, then grew pale.

"Bah, where have you imbibed such nonsense? What do you *know* about God? Great scientists argue that there is no God; and all this cant of the parson is so much talk—nothing more. Ha! ha! Mam'selle, you will be a *rara avis*—I swear it. *A religious actress!*"

"There is no reason why an actress should not love and fear God," she returned, bravely.

He laughed aloud once more, a cold sneering laugh.

"It's as good as a farce to hear you," he cried. "You beautiful wild thing, what lessons in life —stage life—you have yet to learn. Only, with all your wisdom never forget this: *You are mine!* Sooner or later, my pretty bird, you will fly to me. You *shall* be mine; I have sworn it! I will break your spirit, and tame you, and crush this backwoods pride. You will be *glad* to come to me yet, you nameless thing who is going to turn religion loose among the *actresses*. Good-bye, Mam'selle Nobody. Surely, you will let me kiss you once, since it *is* good-bye."

She fell back, with a stifled cry of horror. That cry reached Alaric Brandon's ears; he turned and hastened back, he knew not why. Sebastian Orme's face was white with anger.

"I will make you sorry for this, to the day you die," he said, in a low, threatening voice. "In five years' time, you will be turned forth upon the world, the *bad* world, of the stage, but do not forget that you belong to me, body and soul, and I shall claim you." And turning swiftly, without another glance he was gone.

The next morning Mam'selle entered Prof. Bernard's institution, and its great doors closed behind her for five whole years.

Five years! And at the expiration of that time, what lay before her, what doom awaited her?

Would she live the pure, true life which she had mapped out for herself, even upon the boards of the theatre?

Or, would she listen, as Sebastian Orme had sworn that she should—to the allurements of sin?

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CURTAIN RISES.

FIVE years had passed on down the aisles of Time, and vanished in Eternity. Five years, with their clouds and sunshine, joys and sorrows, disappointments and disillusions. Five years, and Mam'selle was at last emancipated. Five years, which had brought little change to the Winters, where every thing seemed *in statu quo.*

Althea had coldly refused to "make a sick nurse of herself," even for the sake of the man she loved, and Alaric had gone to Europe without her. She had promised to remain true and faithful until such time as he should elect to return to her; he had not expected to be so long absent, but Fate had seemed strangely perverse. For three years—three long sad years, the devoted son had remained with his suffering parent; and then Death had loosened the chains and the poor sufferer was set free. After the death of his mother, Alaric found it necessary to remain abroad for some months longer—settling up his mother's business affairs; and he had only returned home a short time before.

Mam'selle's probation had ended. *Is* it Mam'selle? That tall graceful figure, perfect in *pose*

and carriage, the result of careful training; the face like the face of a dream woman; with its beautiful, fearless dark eyes, whose wonderful depth and fire shone with the light of genius. From head to foot, she was simply perfect. But it was not alone the physical beauty which made her so alluring. She was possessed of intense and wonderful magnetism, which would hold an audience spellbound; and a voice whose softest tone had power to thrill the heart with its low, sweet music.

To her delight, and the gratification of Alaric Brandon, Professor Bernard had consented to allow Mam'selle to make her *debut* in the play which Alaric had written; finished now, and very beautiful and pathetic. It had all been left to the professor's management. Alaric was still absent in Europe when the first private rehearsals began; but at last all was ready, and the night of Mam'selle's *debut* on the boards, was publicly announced. The very same newspapers which contained the announcement, also chronicled the return to America of Alaric Brandon, the author of the play, and proceeded to state that in a short time he would lead to the altar the beautiful and accomplished Miss Marsden. Society nodded to each other knowingly. Well, surely this eccentric affair,—which had survived the vicissitudes of some five years, was destined to culminate in marriage after all. Althea Marsden must be *old*—quite old. Why,

she would not be far from thirty, and certain sour and disappointed damsels whose sole and fruitless aim in life had been husband catching, even went so far as to maintain that she was at least thirty-five.

But, all the animadversions of her dear five hundred friends, produced no outward effect upon Althea. She went on in her proud, stately way; and if, in her heart, she secretly anathematized her dilatory lover, she alone knew of it. And she also knew that she held him fast now in chains of welded iron. An honorable man, he had kept her bound all these years, he could not escape the yoke matrimonial now. She set her teeth hard together at the thought, and her eyes gleamed with a frosty light which it was as well that her lover did not see.

The great posters which announced the first appearance of the new star—Mam'selle Lawrence —decorated every public place in the Crescent City. So much had been said of the new aspirant to histrionic honors. Stray bits from Prof. Bernard's honey tipped pen had found their way into the newspapers, and had attracted the attention which he had intended them to do. A lively interest in the young *debutante* had been awakened in the sleepy old city; which is—however—very wide awake, when it comes to the theatre or the opera. * * * *

It was all over at last. The *debut* was made,

and Mam'selle "awoke one morning and found herself famous."

She had arranged to remain under Prof. Bernard's roof for the present. She did not wish to go among strangers, and he had shown such a fatherly interest in her career, that the girl had grown to respect and esteem the ugly old man.

The newspapers were teeming with paragraphs concerning the new star; the grandest success that New Orleans had ever witnessed; the beautiful Unknown who had emerged from obscurity, even as Minerva had sprung from Jove. "Nothing succeeds like success," and Mam'selle had *succeeded.*

The morning after her *debut* she was sitting alone in the pretty parlor which Prof. Bernard had fitted up for her use, when the door opened, and Mam'selle was folded in Valerie's arms. Not a word was spoken; but the pale excited face, and trembling form told the story of sickening suspense which she had endured, and that "Hope deferred which maketh the heart sick."

She gazed long and earnestly into the girl's sweet face. Nothing there but honesty, honor, and candor. The frank eyes were brave and true as ever; Valerie's scrutiny did not displease her. She had seen Mam'selle at long intervals, mere formal calls during her long probation, and had purposely kept from her until after the *debut.*

"I cannot tell you what I think of you, my child," she cried, eagerly. "You were perfect—simply perfect last night. Oh, Mam'selle, this repays me for all the suffering, the anguish, the——" she stopped short, and once more the old proud look settled down upon her face like a mask; "Mam'selle," she went on, slowly, wistfully, after a moment's pause, "in the years to come, you will remember and bear witness that I did my best for you always."

Mam'selle uttered a low cry. "You have done your best, and more—far more—than was required of you," she faltered. "Oh, madame, there is no one like you in this world, no one. Long years ago, I said that if need be, I would give my life in your defense. I repeat it now. I would lay my life down gladly, to serve you."

Aye, that she would, nor deem the sacrifice unjust. But, what if a greater sacrifice than life itself, should be demanded of her? Would she—*could* she—submit? She was not a goddess; but only a frail human creature.

Valerie arose and faced the girl with shining eyes, and a tremulous curve to the proud lips.

"My dear child," she said, the tears in her voice almost choking her, "Heaven forbid that any such fearful sacrifice should ever be required of you. But it could not be, ah no! that could not be possible."

Yet, how could she know, or dream of the

dangers which lay in the path which the poor girl's feet must tread.

"There!" exclaimed Valerie, at length, "I have been unconsciously selfish, for Alaric is out in the carriage all this time waiting to know if you will receive him."

Alaric! The color faded from Mam'selle's cheeks; her eyes grew dark with pain; she looked startled. For even five long years of silence and separation had had no power over this faithful heart, this unworldly love. A sin? The world would say so, but God is wiser, and will judge her accordingly.

She could not speak. She could only stand quite still; one perfect hand, (who, looking upon it, would ever dream of it's former intimate acquaintance with grand père's hoe?) resting like a bit of carven marble, upon the tall back of a chair; the dark eyes uplifted; her face full of dreamy pathos. And then, there was the sound of far off rushing waters in her ears; a faint sense of floating between Heaven and earth; and her hand was in Alaric Brandon's; and his voice (it could never cease to thrill her heart) was speaking her name, and a few words of praise. Ah! praise from lips we love is sweet, *so* sweet!

Until that moment, Mam'selle had not realized the great and marvellous success that she had achieved.

A dreamy restful hour followed; for in Alaric

Brandon's presence she always felt a sense of *rest*. She could not recall afterwards the conversation. She was only dimly conscious that she was happy, with a wild happiness which was as elusive as it was sweet. At last her visitors arose to go.

"I tried to persuade Althea to call upon you," Alaric observed slowly, his face darkening at the memory of his betrothed wife's scornful refusal to do this small act of courtesy. "She did not feel able," he said, "and so I came with Val."

"You were very kind."

Mam'selle did not know whether it was her own voice speaking, or somebody else, "and will your marriage soon take place, monsieur?" His face grew pale.

"This is the last of January," he said, irrelevently. "Lent will be early this spring; it begins in February you know; and strict Episcopalians like Althea, wait for Lent to pass, before 'marrying or giving in marriage.' It would be rather convenient if one could put off the necessity for funerals during Lent, as well. So, the wedding is to take place in April."

"I hope you will be happy." The words left Mam'selle's lips without her volition. He turned and glanced out of the window.

"My dear child," he said, after a pause, "one *never* finds happiness in this world. It is an ever eluding phantom, a will-o'-the-wisp. Don't waste

your life trying to catch it. And now, good morning. Surely I have bored you long enough."

And then, he was gone, gone, and all the sunlight and brightness of the day went with him. What was the matter with the sky? It had been a bright, sunny day; such a winter day as one finds only in New Orleans; but now—now—surely the sky had grown overcast, and grey, and dull.

"It is going to rain!" Mam'selle decided. Yet, at that very moment, her surprised eyes caught a glimpse of the bright sun shining through the lace curtains of the bay window. And—they saw something else also, not so welcome as the sunshine. She saw the tall indolent figure of Sebastian Orme standing in her presence, whither he had been conducted by the servant; and as Mam'selle turned from the window she found his bright, dark, basilisk eyes fastened upon her face with a look in their depths which made her heart sink low with terror.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SEBASTIAN ORME PLAYS HIS WINNING CARD.

SEBASTIAN ORME extended his hand. "Ah, Mam'selle," his eyes taking in every curve of the lissom figure, the dainty coloring of her face, the fervor of the dusky eyes, "I can no longer dub you Mam'selle Nobody! But instead, I doff my hat right humbly to the most successful and enviable *Somebody* that New Orleans has seen for many a day. Mam'selle, I congratulate you." Her eyes met his, with a cold, steady light.

"You are condescending, Monsieur Orme," she returned, frigidly; "but I do not prize your praise, or court your congratulations. You will please dispense with them. What business have you with me? I only receive my friends, Monsieur Orme."

His dark face grew crimson. Under their long, black lashes his eyes flashed with the hidden fires of malice, and a tigerish passion which slays while it caresses.

She had not permitted him to take her hand. She stood before him very self-possessed and quiet, with that dignified calm which comes from the knowledge of one's assured position in the

world. She was not the little backwoods heathen any more, who shrank from his gaze and trembled at his bold sneering words. Gradually the change impressed him, and crept over his understanding. *This* was not Mam'selle Nobody, but a grand woman with exceptional power over the hearts of the people; noble, self-sustaining, and bound in time to become *great.* Instinctively he drew back a little, his eyes falling from before her fearless gaze. No chance of conquering this brave spirit. She was not a helpless child any longer, fit prey for a sensual coward, but a woman; able to hold her own with any Sebastian Orme on earth.

But, there *was* a way, straight to subjugation. There was a way. He remembered, and at the memory he caught his breath sharply, his heart beating wildly; aye, Sebastian Orme's *heart* was beating at last *for a woman's sake.* No make believe this time, no sham; no repetitions of his countless *amours* of the past, but with *love,* such love as a man of his type is capable of, selfish, cruel, crushing.

"Mam'selle!" He stepped to her side, and caught both her little hands in his own. "I will not tease or torment you any more. Forgive me, for having done so. I came here expecting to find a timid child (off the stage); I find instead, a glorious creature who meets the critical gaze of the world with level eyes. A proud, high-strung, sensitive woman. Oh! if there should be a *fall*

from the brave heights to which you have climbed, *what* a fall it would prove!"

She wrenched her hands from his grasp, and with silent disdain, swept past him to the door. There she paused. It was locked and the key gone. White with indignation she flashed about and confronted the cowardly villain—

"Monsieur Orme!" Her voice choked with passionate protest. "You have locked my door and taken the key. I command you to open that door, or I will ring for a servant!"

"Will you?" He stepped to the electric button and laid his hand upon it, "I am a trifle stronger than you," he observed carelessly. "Now, Mam'selle, I ask you to listen to me. I came here to-day for the express purpose of speaking my mind to you, and hearing your answer. I have something to say to you, something of the greatest moment, and I want you to listen to every word I say, and weigh well their importance."

She did not speak; but her great, dark eyes were fixed upon his face with a look of utter scorn and detestation. He went on in a low, eager tone:—

"Mam'selle, I love you. There! you need not shrink back, and look as though I had insulted you. For the first time in my life I have met a woman whom I am willing to marry. All other women who have crossed my path, are merely episodes. Even though dark clouds rest upon your

origin, I tell you, Mam'selle, I want you! I offer you honorable marriage. Will you be my wife?"

She stood gazing into his face with dazed bewildered eyes which did not see.

"*Will* you, Mam'selle?"

You would not know Sebastian Orme's voice, it was so gentle and pleading. Truly, Love had wrought a miracle in the wicked heart of this man. *Love* he called it. There is much so-called love in the world, which the angels in Heaven do not recognize; but over truly pure, unselfish love, the angels keep watch and ward. For the spurious love, like Liberty, has many crimes committed in its name.

"*Will* you, Mam'selle," he repeated once more, his voice so low that it was hardly audible. "I have never asked any woman to be my wife until now. Do not say that I am too old for you! You need someone older to guide and direct you; to lean on; someone who knows the world and its pitfalls better than you. Once more—I ask you —will you be my wife?"

The spell was broken. The trance which seemed to hold the poor girl's senses gave way. She stood before him like a statue—still and speechless; but her eyes—her eyes—*they* spoke volumes of scorn and indignation, which at last found vent from her lips.

"You lock a woman up, and force upon her an unwelcome offer of marriage," she said, in a voice

that quivered with contempt. "Truly—a fine way to influence her decision. A noble and gentlemanly action. Monsieur Orme,—I command you to open that door."

"Not until you have given me an answer," he returned, doggedly.

"Answer? Then, listen to me. I fling back your offer of marriage in your face as a deadly insult. I answer you no! no! a thousand times no! Not to save my own life would I marry a man like you, Sebastian Orme!"

"Not to save your own life!" He repeated her words slowly, a crimson flame mounting to his brow; "but, you will do it to save one dear to you, perhaps as dear as your own life! One whose disgrace and ruin would, in a measure reflect upon your friend Brandon, and who would herself be utterly and forever annihilated, as far as the world of fashionable society is concerned."

"What—whom—do—you mean?" she demanded bravely. He smiled. It was such a smile as Mephistopheles might have smiled when he saw the soul of Faust within his clutches.

"Whom? *That* is easily answered. Valerie Winter—to be sure!"

"What do you mean? Answer me, or I will have you punished as you deserve."

Her eyes were blazing; her pale face wore a look which made the sluggish blood dance around the half petrified organ which Sebastian Orme

called a *heart*. How beautiful,—how perfect she was! She *must* be his; he had sworn it. And he was willing to *marry* her! He, the rich and fashionable Orme, was willing to take for his wife this nameless little creature from the Louisiana back woods.

"Answer me!" she commanded imperiously.

"I will, to be sure, my dear. That is my chief business here to-day. That is why I locked the door yonder,—to secure our *tête-à-tête* from interruption. Furthermore, I have told your servant that I am here upon urgent business with you, and that he is to admit no one during my stay."

"Monster!"

He bowed.

"Even opprobrium is pleasant from such perfect lips. I repeat it, Mam'selle—you have it in your power to save your benefactress, Mrs. Winter, from an awful fate. From humiliation, poverty, disgrace, the utter ruin of her good name!"

"Stop! Stop! I command you! How dare you speak *her* name in connection with disgrace and ruin? How *dare* you?"

"I dare anything. Besides, it is true. Mam'selle, use reason; and believe my words. Do you imagine that I would *dare* affirm anything derogatory to Mrs. Winter, if I had not reason—good reason—for my course? I tell you, child, there is a secret in her past, a black secret, which she

would give her life rather than have revealed. I *know* this secret. Althea Marsden knows it; in fact some hints which she let drop, first helped me to ferret it out. But it all lies in your hands, Mam'selle. Will you save Valerie Winter—or not?"

A long, long silence. The girl stood with her face turned away, her brave heart quailing, though she would not let the craven suspect it. She turned at last, and he shrank from the sight of her white face, and blazing eyes.

"You coward!" she panted, "you vile coward and persecutor of women. I will listen to no false tales from your false lips. Dare to mention Mrs. Winter's name in connection with disgrace, and I will make you rue it!"

"I tell you it is true—all true! But, you and I can cover it up, and save her—save her, Mam'selle!"

"But—the price?"

She was brought to bay at last. Something in his eyes, in his voice, in the expression of his face convinced her in spite of herself that there must be truth in what he had asserted.

"The—price!" she repeated, fiercely.

"Your hand in marriage. Refuse, and the world shall know the truth. And with Valerie Winter you too must fall. Aye, the ruin of one, smites down the other. I will drag you from the stage whose proudest honors you have won,

through hard study and diligent preparation. I will tear you from your lofty eminence, with 'all your blushing honors thick upon you,' and hurl you down into the dust, with *her!* The ruin of one means the ruin of the other. Choose now, now, I say, which shall it be? So help me Heaven, I have spoken the truth, and all this power lies in my hands. Answer me: which shall it be?"

She buried her white face in her shaking hands, and all was still. After a time she lifted her face, from which the youth seemed all departed, and her eyes full of anguish met his.

"Will you give me time?" she faltered, brokenly, "a little time to think it over? Just a little?"

His eyes flashed. So, he had humbled her, and she was pleading before him.

"To be sure! I am not altogether a brute. I will come here this evening before you go to the theatre, and I shall expect your answer."

"Very well. Now, go."

He unlocked the door, and without a word took his departure. She heard the outer door of the house close behind him, and a shudder ran over her.

"*God!*"

It was all that she could say; that Holy Name which was a tower of strength to her. For Mam'selle's faith and trust in the *loving* God had

never faltered, since the night, five years ago, when in that squalid cabin, a faithful, God-fearing soul had taught her "the one thing needful."

An hour later, Mam'selle rang the bell at the Winter mansion, and was soon standing in Valerie's presence, upon her face the dark shadow of despair.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE SECRET IS TOLD.

VALERIE was alone in the music room, seated at the piano playing softly to herself. Upon her face a cloud of sadness rested, and in her eyes there was a pathetic look. As Mam'selle crossed the threshold, she turned slowly upon the music stool, and saw her.

"My child!" starting to her feet, and taking the slight figure in her arms; "what has happened? I read the story in your face; your speaking face and soulful eyes betray you. Tell me dear—tell me."

She removed Mam'selle's hat and drew her to her side upon a low divan in a corner. Close beside the divan, there was an archway dividing the music room from the drawing-room, which was cut off by means of heavy velvet *portieres*. Within the drawing-room, somebody was seated, somebody of whose presence there Mrs. Winter did not dream.

"Now tell me, Mam'selle," caressing the girl's bowed head with one white hand, "what has happened? I can bear it whatever it is, as long as you are well and happy in your chosen art." Mam'selle's eyes filled with tears.

"I am well, and would be happy," she answered, slowly, "but it seems decreed that I should not be. Madame, happiness is not for me, I fear. Well, I will tell you all, for I must soon return to Prof. Bernard; he has some hints to give me before to-night's performance. Madame, after you left me this morning you and *monsieur*—I had another call. It was Monsieur Orme." Valerie looked annoyed. "I am sorry dear, if he has taken an interest in you," she said. "It is small compliment to any woman, that she attracts Sebastian Orme."

"I know it. But, he has asked me to marry him."

"*Mam'selle*! Incredible! Why Sebastian Orme has been opposed to marriage always. Yet many a woman would have become his wife; yes—dear—in spite of his badness and his unsavory reputation as a *rouè*. In spite of it all, there are hundreds of women who would gladly accept him. It is pitiful. He has wealth you see, dear, and money like charity, 'covers a multitude of sins.'"

"I would not marry such a man for any consideration," cried Mam selle, passionately; forgetting for the moment, her own sad position. "I would not—I—oh! Madame—*must* I!"

"My child, what do you mean? *Must* you marry Sebastian Orme? No! No! No! You must not! You *shall* not! I forbid it!"

Mam'selle's face was pale and troubled; into her dusky eyes great tears gathered swiftly.

"Madame, I *must* speak, though it cuts my heart in two, to tell you. He—monsieur Orme asked me to be his wife, and because I refused, proudly, scornfully, (for I would rather *die* than sell myself in that base way) he has sworn to be revenged. And madame, he will strike to *my* heart through *you*."

Valerie's face grew white; she pressed her hand upon her heart, and her breath came and went, in painful gasps.

"Explain," she faltered.

"It breaks my heart to have to tell you," returned Mam'selle, slowly and hesitatingly; "it seems impossible for me to speak such words to *you;* I—the nameless Nobody, who owe all that I am to you, you, the best and noblest woman on earth. But madame, it is only right, it is wise that you should learn all that he said; you will need to *know*, so that you can suppress the lie, and brand the liar before the public. Listen, and I will tell you all."

She slipped her hand into Valerie's, and in a low voice, but perfectly distinct and audible *upon the other side of the portieres*, Mam'selle repeated the entire interview, omitting nothing.

And as she spoke, the face of her listener froze into icy whiteness; her pale lips grew rigid, and her eyes held the look of one who has been shot, shot through the heart. When the story was told, Valerie slipped down from the velvet divan

upon her knees, and folded her arms about Mam'-selle.

"Dear! Look into my face," she moaned in faltering accents, "look into my eyes, Mam'selle, and read there the bitter truth. I thought never to reveal my secret, my miserable secret, to a living creature, but fate has been too strong for me, and the time has come for you to know. Mam'-selle, *I am your mother!* Your unhappy mother!"

Not a word passed Mam'selle's lips. She sat like one suddenly turned to stone, her eyes dilated and dark, were fixed upon space. She scarcely breathed, so intense was her surprise, and bewilderment. At last:—

"It is impossible! How could it be true?"

"It—it *is* true, child. Let me tell my story. I was only a girl—a mere child—when I first met Lawrence Dorne, the actor. He was handsome and fascinating, and he was the greatest actor America has ever known. I loved him, Mam'-selle, and—he—loved me. Ah! there is no doubt upon that score; and it is the only bit of happiness which has kept my heart alive, all these long, dark, dreary years. Mam'selle, we loved each other! It was no ordinary love, but absolute and ideal worship. My mother was bitterly opposed to it, for she had set her heart upon my marrying Mr. Winter, that I might have wealth and position; and he had promised to provide for Althea also. My mother's health was poor, and she was

devoted to Althea, and for her welfare was willing to sacrifice me. Well the result of her persecutions was to drive me into Lawrence Dorne's arms. We were secretly married, and just before you were born—*he died.* So I was left to face the world—the cruel, censorious world—alone, with a stain upon my name, for I had no proof of our marriage. My mother had destroyed all the proofs—so I learned later. One day she summoned me into her presence, and there she commanded me to marry Stephen Winter, or she would publish my shame to the world. Dear, what could I do! I believed my mother, of course, but all the time I knew that their was no shame connected with me. Yet still I was powerless to prove my innocence. At last she took me away to an old plantation on the Teche, and there you were born. But she told me that my child was born dead, and I believed her, of course; she was my mother. But in reality she had left you in charge of two old people, the Grandjeans, who, for a sum of money consented to rear you. Afterwards, unknown to my mother they removed to the pine woods where you lived. Of course I did not know that they were there, when I joined Althea's party in quest of her truant lover. Mam'selle, I knew you at once. Fancy what that knowledge was to me."

Mam'selle stooped, and pressed her lips to the bowed head. "I never suspected my mother's

treachery," Mrs. Winter went on, slowly, "until upon her death-bed she confessed all. I had been married to Stephen Winter for some time then."

"Mam'selle I can understand Sebastian Orme's revenge. He will blast your reputation and mine —in one blow; drive you from the stage, and make outcasts and Pariahs of us both. Heaven help us. Where *could* he have learned my secret?"

"He said that Althea—Miss Marsden knew, and had set him on the track." Mrs. Winter uttered a low cry.

"*Althea*! My own sister! This is more bitter than death. I understand her motive though. Beside the love of money she has but one ruling passion—jealousy. And she was jealous of you —and Alaric."

Mam'selle was weeping softly. Valerie caught her in his arms and held her close to her yearning heart. "My child," she cried, her voice trembling with emotion, "my poor, wronged little child."

"*Mrs. Winter!*"

They both started as with an electric shock. A rude hand had torn aside the *portieres*, and Stephen Winter stood before them, his face flushed with insane anger, trembling with wordless wrath. One glance, and the two frightened women knew that he had heard all. He strode to Valerie's side, and laid a heavy hand upon her shoulder. "Out of my house, wanton!" he hissed.

Slowly Valerie arose to her feet. Mam'selle con-

fronted the brutal travesty upon the name of man, with white face and blazing eyes.

"Be careful how you speak to *my mother*," she cried, bravely. "Henceforth, she is under my protection. Come, mother, you shall go home with me. I will take care of you!"

At that moment, Althea put in an appearance. She was attired in street dress, for she had an appointment with her lover. And even as she entered the drawing-room and paused aghast at the unexpected scene, the servant announced "Mr. Brandon!"

"Althea! Althea!" Valerie's voice was shrill with anguish, her face full of reproach, "how could you be base enough to tell my secret, my *sinless* secret, to a man like Sebastian Orme? You, for whom I long ago sacrificed my own happiness, and chose for my lot in life—a living death!"

An hour later, when Alaric Brandon left the Winter mansion, the diamond ring which he had placed upon Althea's finger more than five years before, was hidden away in his pocket, and the engagement was cancelled. When he had heard the whole story of Althea's treachery to her noble, cross-bearing sister, he realized the awful mistake such a marriage would be. He told her so with almost brutal frankness. She drew the ring from her finger and threw it at his feet; then without a word she left the room—and all was over.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HER LAST APPEARANCE.

An hour before Mam'selle was due at the theater, Sebastian Orme made his appearance. She was alone in her pretty parlor, gowned in a long, clinging robe of black velvet; her face pale and grave, her eyes dark with suppressed passion, and a wild protest against the hard fate which encompassed her. He came straight to where she was standing, leaning against the marble mantel, her eyes fixed upon the fire which glowed in the grate.

"Well?" he interrogated, bluntly, "which is it to be, Mam'selle? Are you going to say *yes*, and be my wife at once; or, are you mad enough to still refuse?"

She lifted her eyes to his face; and somehow, at sight of the fearless light in their clear depths, he shrunk back *afraid*.

"I have answered you, Monsieur Orme, she said, slowly. "I told you this morning—no—no—a thousand times—*no*! I repeat it to-night. I would not marry you, to save my own life." His eyes blazed.

"But—you *will* marry me—to save the honor of——"

"My mother? She will not permit the sacrifice. She would kill herself first."

"Your—*mother!* So! You have learned the truth. How?"

"From her own lips. After you left me this morning, I went to her at once, and she has told me all. You know, too, Sebastian Orme, that there is no shame connected with my mother's name, my mother's past!"

He smiled an unpleasant smile. "Prove it!" he said, sharply. "Ah, my dear Mam'selle, old Mrs. Marsden was very wise, when she burned the marriage certificate of Lawrence Dorne and Valerie Marsden. And fate helped her too, for the church where the records were kept, was destroyed by lightning in a late storm; and even the clergyman who performed the cermony has disappeared. No doubt he is dead, for it was over twenty-one years ago that the marriage took place. Even the witnesses are dead. My dear Mam'selle, I would not advise you to search for those missing proofs. You might as well look for a needle in a hay mow."

She made no answer, but her face still wore the same look of calm resolution. It was as though she felt that she had seen and borne the worst; and fate could have no harder blow in store for her. She turned to where upon a chair nearby, her wraps were lying, ready for her to go to the theatre.

"There is no more to be said," she observed, coldly. "My mother is under my protection. She will leave New Orleans to-morrow, for the north, to visit some relatives of Monsieur Brandon. You cannot harm her. *I* will take care of her in future. Thank God for giving me the gifts which enable me to do so. I ask no greater happiness on earth."

"Stop a moment, Mam'selle. You are mistaken. There is more to be said, and something to be done; and I—Sebastian Orme—will do it. I will place the case before you in a few brief words. You are going to be my wife. There is no way of escape for you, save with the loss of your mother's good name, and the *prestige* and position which you now hold. True, *anything* is excusable, anything is overlooked in an actress. They are not expected to be female Bayards; if they were such in reality no one would believe it. But, Mrs. Stephen Winter is quite another person. She has reigned queen of New Orleans' society for twenty years, surrounded by luxury, and troops of flattering, fawning friends, the last one of whom will desert her, when shame and disgrace come upon her. Suppose the story of Valerie Winter's past was made public? The world might pity you, but it would *censure* her. She would be ostracized, and her name—her proud name—flaunted in the flash papers, together with her photograph, which would be

readily obtained by those public scavengers. She would be a lost and ruined woman ; and she is innocent (I *know* that, Mam'selle !) then, think you what her life would be. Mam'selle, promise to be my wife, and I will claim you at once. All this story shall remain a secret : you shall go on with your career upon the stage, and become what you are meant to be—the queen of American actresses, with wealth and position all your own. That is one side of the picture ; now look at the other side. Refuse to be my wife, and to-morrow all the newspapers shall blaze with the story of your mother's past. The world shall learn that she—the mother of the most brilliant actress in America is only a—"

"Stop ! "

"And remember," he went on, precisely, as though she had not spoken at all, "that this is not an every-day affair. Under ordinary circumstances the world does not trouble its head, as to—

> 'Who was her father ?
> Who was her mother ?
> Had she a sister ?
> Had she a brother ?'

in regard to the common-place stage light. But *you* are destined to be a tragedy queen. And your mother—has helped to uphold New Orleans' gilded society for many years, besides being a prominent member of its most fashionable church.

One hates to descend to back stair devices to accomplish one's desires, but I see no other way, and I have sworn to have you! So, take your choice!"

She had been standing, with her eyes—great horror-filled eyes fastened upon his face. She turned slowly now and picking up her wrap from the chair, threw it about her shoulders. Then, tying a lace scarf over her head she moved with stately grace to the door, opened it, and without a word, passed out into the night.

A moment later he heard the sound of wheels driving away from the house. Sebastian Orme caught his breath with a cry of rage.

"She has gone straight to her doom," he muttered—"well—so be it."

That night Mam'selle's acting far eclipsed the first night. In the play—so sad and pathetic the heroine gives her life for one she loves. But *this* heroine, this poor, little modern heathen,—was about to give something dearer to herself than existence.

All during the play, Mam'selle was conscious of Sebastian Orme's dark, angry eyes fixed upon her from his seat in a stage box—waiting—waiting—as the huge python waits for the moment when its coils can descend upon its victim, to crush the life out of the quivering, trembling form. Mam'selle knew that he was only waiting. She thought of the morrow, and the shameful

story which he would spend abroad, and a shudder ran over her. Then, her eyes wandered to the opposite stage box, and she saw Alaric Brandon. A wave of crimson overspread her face as she met his eyes, and her voice faltered. Sebastian Orme watched the scene with greedy eyes, and a slow smile just touched his lips. "So," he muttered, under his breath, "I see now. But I know the Brandon pride. He will never give a thought to a woman with such a stain upon her name, when he learns the truth." And Sebastian Orme never dreamed that to Alaric Brandon the truth was known already.

The curtain arose upon the last act, and as it progressed Mam'selle played as she had never yet played, with a hidden fire and a fervor which surprised even her best friends. Alas! poor Mam'selle! She knew that it was her last appearance upon the stage—her last appearance! The play went on to the end. It was over at last; but before the curtain descended, the young actress advanced to the footlights and paused there.

In a long, straight robe of white silk embroidered with gold thread, she looked like some Greek goddess as she stood facing the vast audience. And then—she spoke. What—*what* was that which she was saying? Sebastian Orme started, and an awful look stole over his face. In a few well chosen words, Mam'selle was thanking the public for their kind appreciation, and was

bidding the theatrical world farewell forever. At the very beginning of her career, she had decided to lay down the sceptre and retire to private life. But Sebastian Orme and Alaric Brandon read between the lines, and knew her motive. She was going away with her mother—her heart-broken, unhappy mother. For her dear sake, Mam'selle was sacrificing all—all her hopes and ambitions. In private life, in some retired place, they would hide their secret—a sinless secret—from the unbelieving, censorious world.

She spoke few words, but the hearts of the people were touched. They knew not *why* she was resigning all the bright future before her, but the sad voice and the heart-break in the eyes, went to their warm generous hearts. With one accord they arose to their feet, and cheer upon cheer soared from parquet to dome. In the midst of it all, Mam'selle disappeared.

Alaric Brandon found himself out in the open air, wandering about like a disembodied spirit. For an hour he paced Canal street; then, slowly and like one in a dream he went to his rooms. Entering, he turned up the gas, and sunk into a low chair, where he sat like a statue for some time, his face very pale, his eyes grave and serious. At length he lifted his head and a light shone upon his face, "that light which never was, on sea or land."

"I see it all at last," he murmured, softly—"what a blind fool I have been. *I love her!* I have loved the child, ever since those old days in the pine woods."

The sun was setting in golden glory over the Lousiana pine woods—a little forgotten corner of God's beautiful earth. It was winter, yet the sun-rays had succeeded in coaxing a few violets forth, and they were pushing their way up to the light, while from under the brown pine needles, the sturdy four leaf blue, was peeping out with eyes the color of a summer sky.

Down the long path which led from the old house by the river side, Alaric Brandon was hastening along. He had come here to seek Mam'selle. But the old house was empty and deserted, and a passing wood chopper informed him that grand père was dead, and grand mère had gone back to "the Teche country," and the old house, falling to ruin fast, was shunned as an unholy place.

Alaric listened in silence, then giving the man some money, he turned away, and a little later he drew near the spot where old Father Andrea lay buried. And there he found her.

Crouching beside the sunken mound, her face hidden in the tall grass, knelt the woman who had given up the world, and made of herself an unknown, uncrowned martyr, to shield her

mother's honor—her mother's name—from the world's contumely and scorn. She knelt there all alone beside that lonely forgotten grave. Her faithful heart had gone back to the old days, when the dead man who slept there so peacefully had taught her to be good and true; to "serve God, and fear a lie."

The dying sun-rays touched the bowed head, and wove about it a crown of golden glory. She was "not of the world, and the world hated her." She may have been a modern heathen, but surely in her unselfish self-sacrifice, she was also a martyr.

Alaric Brandon stooped and lifted the slight form in his arms.

"Mam'selle," he said, softly, "oh, my Love of Loves!"

Her eyes met his with a glad light; and all the sorrow and despair gave way to the sweetness of love, a divine faith and a perfect trust. Her head drooped humbly upon his breast, and all was still. Hand in hand they would face the world together, for to their unworldly hearts "LOVE IS ENOUGH."

THE END.

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